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The Phantom Rider.



STAYTON RIDGE

THE GREAT CANYON STATE

A NEW AND COMPLETE

BY ALVIN C. HOLT

NEW YORK: THE GREAT CANYON STATE

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THE
PHANTOM RIDER;

OR,
THE GIANT CHIEF'S FATE.

A TALE OF THE OLD DAHCOTAH COUNTRY.

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AUTHOR OF POCKET NOVEL NO. 47, "THE MAN HUNTER."

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THE PHANTOM RIDER;

OR,

THE GIANT CHIEF'S FATE.

CHAPTER I

VINNIE'S PERIL.

THE scene of our story is laid in the great North-west.

It was a bleak, windy day in November. The shrill blasts wailed through the forest trees like the last despairing cry of a lost spirit, and gust after gust beat and roared around the little log cabin standing so silent and lonely, half buried in the midst of the Titanic oaks that spread their long branches protectingly over its low roof, and whose sturdy trunks environed it, seeming to keep silent and untiring guard over its four rough walls.

The scene within the cabin was in striking contrast with the wild aspect without.

It was a rude but homelike place, and despite the chinked walls and rough furniture, there was such an air of plain comfort as one might expect to see in the abode of the sturdy western pioneer.

A young girl sat by a table engaged in embroidering a broad strip of dressed deer-skin with fancifully colored beads and quills—a blue-eyed, slender-looking little woman with shining masses of golden-brown hair falling unconfined about her small, shapely head, and down over her shoulders until it reached the waist of her dress, which fitted her willowy form to perfection, and whose ample folds half concealed, half disclosed a small, neatly-clad foot and well-turned ankle.

Her sunny blue eyes held a soft, loving light, and a bright smile played continually upon her dainty face and around her rosy little mouth, with its ripe lips half parted from the rows of small white teeth.

But the azure eyes could flash with courage and determination, and the pretty mouth could be hard and stern with its strawberry lips tightly drawn and its tiny, gleaming teeth hard-set.

The settler's daughter was very lovely, and she possessed a nerve and courage far beyond her sex.

A tall, powerfully-made man of fifty stood near the great wide-mouthed fire-place, in which a ruddy blaze leapt and glowed fantastically, shedding a pleasant radiance over the homely place that could not but be grateful to one who, like Emmett Darke, was preparing to leave it and go out into the wind and cold of the chill November day. But the settler, long used to the perils of border life, thought little of this.

His sharp gray eye and firm though pleasant mouth bespoke indomitable courage and strength of will; and as he stood there in the red glow of the dancing firelight, buckling on his deer-skin belt in which he thrust the borderman's trusty companion, a long, keen-edged hunting-knife, with a brace of heavy pistols, he looked the personification of the ideal hunter of the far western wilds.

A huge bloodhound lay on the floor at his feet—a large, red-eyed creature with white, gleaming teeth—a brute that might be a true and faithful friend, but could not but be a terribly dangerous enemy.

The object in the room most likely to attract the attention of a casual observer was a small square box of polished wood, standing on the table.

Besides the tall clock ticking in a corner, this casket was the only visible thing that bore evidence of having been made by hands more skilled than those of the settler, or with tools other than those common implements ever ready at the pioneer's grasp, the ax and the auger.

What this curious little box contained, will appear hereafter.

Soon the hunter's preparations were completed, and sling-ing a long rifle, which he had taken down from its place on three pegs in the wall, across his shoulders, he turned to his daughter who had wound the soft deer-skin belt, upon which she had wrought innumerable fancy devices, gracefully about

her waist and shoulders, and stood regarding him with a merry light sparkling in her blue eyes.

"How do I look, papa?" she asked. "Like some dusky forest princess?"

And she finished by placing a jaunty turban in which were fastened several bright-colored plumes, which drooped down until they touched her beautiful golden hair, coquettishly on her head.

"More like a regular angel, wings and all!" he exclaimed, admiringly: for Emmett Darke loved his beautiful motherless child more than his life. "That hair and those eyes of yours don't look very Injiny. Wouldn't that red lover of yours go wild if he saw you now? I don't wonder he's half-crazy and calls you 'Sun-Hair!' How about that youngster, Clancy Vere, eh, Vinnie? Has he an eye to beauty?"

The maiden blushed rosy red; but the laughing eyes became thoughtful in a moment.

"Do you know, papa, that I often think of him—the Indian? Oh, if he should come some day when you are gone! He is wild and bloodthirsty and his passions are ungovernable. He has taken a solemn vow to make me his wife!"

"He shall never fulfill that vow!" cried the old man, with a dangerous light in his cold gray eyes. "I'll have his life, first! If he comes here again I'll give him a free pass to the happy hunting-grounds!"

Emmett Darke's face was almost white with rage, and he brought the heavy stock of his long rifle down on the floor with a sharp bang.

"Just so sure as that red devil has the misfortune to be caught anywhere near my cabin, I will shoot him down like the coward he is! My daughter is never to become a squaw, eh, Vinnie?"

"Never, father! Never will I become the Indian's wife! I would sooner shed my own heart's blood!"

She spoke so calmly and yet determinedly that her father half-shuddered. He knew that she meant every word, and he breathed an inward prayer that God would watch over his lonely child and guard her from all peril during his absence.

The hunter stood silent and motionless for a few moments,

thinking intently. Arousing himself at length, he said, turning to the blood-hound, who was on his feet in an instant, running around him and licking his hands:

"Come, Death! We must go."

In a few minutes they had passed out, and were walking rapidly and silently through the forest.

As Darke went away, a face appeared among the thick bushes close by the cabin—a red face, hideously daubed with black and yellow paint, with long, coarse black hair, hanging down the sunken jaws, and fierce black eyes flashing triumph and exultation as the hunter disappeared from view. Darke did not see this face, and the bushes closed over it in a moment, concealing it as suddenly as it had appeared.

After her father was gone, Vinnie went and stood before the fireplace, looking down into the red mass of leaping flames.

She was deeply buried in thought, and she heard no sound save the hissing of the fire and the wailing of the wind around the corners of the cabin, and through the bare branches of the great oaks outside.

She little thought what a lovely picture she made as she stood thus, silent and motionless—one might almost imagine breathless—with a dreamy, far-off look in her soft eyes, and the glancing blaze lighting up her fair face till she looked, in fantastic guise, like some beautified Fairy queen, some incomparable silvan goddess.

Rarely, radiantly lovely she appeared, strangely out of place in that homely room.

She was unconscious of this—unconscious, also, of another presence in the cabin until the back-log fell suddenly with a dull thud, throwing out a shower of red sparks and arousing her on the instant from the fit of abstraction into which she had fallen.

With a quick start, she turned her head and saw a tall form close behind her—so near that it might easily have touched her.

It was the form of an Indian, powerful and massive. The face was the same that had peered through the shrubbery at Emmett Darke a few minutes before.

There was a strange light glowing in the fierce eyes fixed

so steadily on the lovely face before him—a look of wild passion as dangerous as it was intense.

The savage did not speak nor even stir; but the hard, cruel lines on his forehead and about his mouth relaxed a little as he tried to twist his ugly visage into the semblance of a smile—a semblance that was even more loathsome than its habitual scowl—that was nearer the leer of an exultant fiend than the smile of a human being.

Vinnie's face was deathly pale, and her heart seemed for a moment to lay still in her bosom; but she tried to meet the gaze of those devilish eyes calmly. She stood quite still, looking into the cruel face, but she dared not trust her voice.

The Indian spoke at length, in a tone harsh and rasping, like the snarl of some wild animal:

"Ku-nan-gu-no-nah has come for his squaw. Sun-Hair is very beautiful. Ku-nan-gu-no-nah is a mighty warrior. He has always loved the white maiden since he met her in the forest many moons ago. The great chief's heart has been burning for Sun-Hair. He has prepared his wigwam. It is hung around with the scalps of his slain foes. Sun-Hair will be a queen. The Indian women will bow down their heads in shame before the beautiful Sun-Hair! Is she ready? Will she go with the great chief? His warriors are waiting to see their queen!"

For a moment Vinnie did not speak, then the words came clear and sharp from her white lips:

"No! I will never go!"

The chief's face was fairly demoniac in an instant—the sickish leer was gone, and the savage teeth shone through the drawn lips in two white, gleaming rows. He advanced with a quick motion, and laid his hand roughly on her arm.

"Come!" said the harsh voice, "Sun-Hair must go!"

CHAPTER II.

CLANCY VERE AND HIS TROUBLE.

"HERE I am!"

It was a young man who spoke, standing on the bank of a small stream that had its course through the forest at a point about two miles distant, as a bird flies, from Emmett Darke's cabin.

He was tall and well-formed, with hazel eyes and dark-brown hair. His face was clear-cut and handsome, open and frank in its expression, while it indicated a goodly stock of firmness and courage.

This is Clancy Vere, the young hunter, an allusion to whom had brought the rich blood to Vinnie's face that very afternoon.

He was clad in a complete suit of dressed deer-skin, elaborately ornamented about the shoulders with bright-colored beads and quills, his hunting-shirt being gathered about his waist with a wide belt from which protruded the stock of a heavy revolver and the silver-mounted hilt of a long bowie-knife, while a powder-horn and bullet-pouch were slung by a leathern cord under his left arm.

As he spoke, he dropped the butt of his rifle, a trim, beautifully-mounted weapon, until it rested on the turf at his feet; then he stood leaning on it for a long time, looking intently down into the depths of the eddying stream before him.

He was thinking—of a girl with blue eyes and golden brown hair—of Emmett Darke's beautiful daughter, Vinnie.

Clancy Vere loved Vinnie devotedly, and not hopelessly, she had led him to think; though, as yet, he had never made any formal declaration of his passion.

Still, as a look is oftentimes fraught with more meaning than the most high-sounding speech, and the pioneer's daughter had not, upon certain occasions which he could recall,

been chary of these looks, Vere was very far from being despondent.

He lived at a small settlement a half-dozen miles away, and had set out that morning to visit the cabin of the hunter. His errand there may be easily surmised.

He had proceeded thus far on his way without adventure worthy of note, and intended to cross the stream in a canoe that he knew Darke kept concealed in the undergrowth at a place a hundred yards below the spot where he now stood.

So intent was he upon his musings, that he heard no sound save the rippling of the water and the roar of the wind through the trees.

He did not see the bushes part close behind him and a dusky form emerge from its concealment, to be followed by another, then another, until six Indians had entered the little grassy space in which he was standing, and began stealthily to take different positions around him until his chances of escape were cut off on all sides.

He was brought to realize his situation in a moment.

A chorus of shrill, exultant yells rang out on every hand.

He turned on the instant, and his quick eye measured the strength of his savage foes. They were too near at hand for him to bring his rifle to bear; but gripping it firmly around the barrel, he brought the ponderous stock down on his nearest assailant, crushing in his skull like an egg-shell.

There was a muffled thud as the deadly weight fell a second time, and another savage sunk over on the ground without a groan.

An Indian was creeping up stealthily behind him. As Vere raised his clubbed rifle a third time, throwing it high above his head, in order that the blow might be more effective, the savage, who had been crouching down on the ground a moment close beside him, sprung high in the air, and clutching the gun-barrel near the lock, wrenched it from the young hunter's hands just as it began to descend.

This quick, hard pull upon the weapon, which he gripped with all his strength, caused him to stagger a trifle, and before he could regain his footing and draw his bowie-knife, the three remaining Indians sprung upon him and bore him to the ground.

In a moment his elbows were pinioned behind his back, and his weapons were transferred from his belt to those of his captors.

They pulled him roughly to his feet, and an Indian took his place on either side, leading him along by the arms. The brave who had disarmed him walked behind, while the remaining savage, who was evidently a warrior of some importance, to judge from the number of eagle's feathers which ornamented his head and the many trophies of the war path and the chase which were hung about his neck and secured to his belt, led the way up the stream, pausing ever and anon to give some guttural command in his native dialect to his followers, who clutched their captive's arms firmly, as if they feared that, bound and almost helpless as he was, he would attempt to escape.

They had seen evidence of his prowess, and wisely concluded that he was a safer prisoner well guarded than when allowed to walk alone.

For an hour they kept on, over fallen trees and heaps of rock, through tangled masses of undergrowth, now bearing a little to the right, then to the left; but always keeping within hearing of the stream, whose monotonous murmurings seemed to grow louder and hoarser as they proceeded, until they changed to a wild, sullen roar, like the impetuous rushing and dashing of a cataract.

At length, after a long silence, the leader of the party turned toward Vere and said, impressively:

"Does the pale-face hear the song of the waterfall? It is chanting his death-song! The black waters laugh because they will swallow up the pale-face!"

Soon the sun appeared through an opening in the leaden gray clouds that had drifted lazily through the sky until they were gathered together in a dark, lowering mass overhead, and its bright rays trembled for a moment upon the surface of the water.

"See!" continued the Indian, pointing to the falls just visible through the trees. "See the waters smile! They laugh because the red men will give them a pale-face victim! Let the white man hear them sing! 'Ha! ha!' they say, 'the pale-face must die!' It is his death chant! The great

Manitou is speaking through the laughing waters. He is happy with his red children when a pale-face dies. The white hunter is brave. He is not afraid to fight. But his heart will grow small within his bosom when he must go down into the black waters—the river of death! Will he be brave when he meets the unknown dangers of the dark valley? He will find it hard to die now. He is young and the world looks bright to his eyes. Perhaps a white woman will weep when he is dead. The Indian women have mourned for their husbands and brothers when they have gone out to fight the Long-knives and never returned. The laughing waters are crying aloud for their victim. The white man must die!

"We all must die," said Vere, calmly, not caring to show the concern he really felt. "Men have died before, why should I fear death?"

An expression of surprise flitted over the Indian's painted face.

Few men could meet death so calmly.

The young hunter had resolved not to die without a desperate struggle; but he preferred that his captors should think him resigned to his fate—the horrible fate which seemed inevitable.

A few rods above the falls a tree grew far out over the water, rushing madly to the cataract below.

The bank at this point was rough and jagged, its steep and rocky sides jutting out full twenty feet above the black, roaring mass underneath.

The party halted here.

"The pale-face hunter's feet must be tied," said the Indian who had spoken before. "He must not fight with the laughing waters."

Producing a stout leathern thong, about twelve feet in length, one of the savages advanced to coil it around the captive's ankles.

As he stooped, Vere drew his foot back suddenly and planted it with tremendous force squarely in his face, flattening his long nose and knocking out several of his sharp white teeth.

The Indian rolled over on the ground with a wild screech.

The pain was terrible, and he lay for a moment, pressing his di-figured face and giving utterance to a series of hoarse, agonized groans.

Then he sprung up suddenly with a wild yell of rage and vengeance.

He was upon Vere in an instant, his long fingers entwined in his hair and his scalping-knife circling with lightning rapidity around his head.

The young hunter's arms were securely pinioned.

He was utterly powerless in the red fiend's hands.

Death—sudden and terrible—seemed certain; but he did not flinch.

His fearless eye was fixed on the Indian's face, and his own did not change when he felt the keen knife-point pricking the skin upon the crown of his head.

He was not afraid to die.

He thought of the terrible, because unknown life beyond the grave—and of Vinnie!

Would she weep when he was gone?

He trusted so, and stood calmly awaiting the great change.

CHAPTER III.

VINNIE'S STRATAGEM.

VINNIE'S face was very pale, but she did not cry out. A wild fear, an awful terror, was tugging at her heart, but she would not give way to it. She knew she would need all her native courage and coolness in the ordeal which she foresaw she must endure.

Ku-nan-gu-no-nah's hand retained its rough grip on her arm, and his harsh voice repeated:

"Come. Sun-Hair must go!"

Resistance would, she knew, be of no avail. It would only serve to arouse the Indian's passions to a still higher pitch of intensity—to make him, if possible, still more demoniac, and still more determined than ever to fulfill his vow, and carry out his intention to abduct and bear her away to his wigwam.

She must have recourse to stratagem.

So, to gain time, she said as calmly as possible, but with a wild throbbing at her heart which she tried in vain to still:

"So the great chief loves the pale-face maiden? He would make her a queen? He would spend his whole life to make her happy? Is it not so?"

"Yes," he said, eagerly. "Ku-nan-gu-no-nah loves Sun-Hair as the bird loves its mate. He will always make her happy. She shall never know what it is to weep. Her life shall always be pleasant. It shall be like a day when the green grass is new on the ground, and the dancing waters, freed from their cold bonds of ice, are laughing in the bright sunlight."

"And my life shall be like one long day in the bright spring-time?" she said, as bravely as she could, smiling through all her fear.

"Yes," again said the chief, with a searching look in her white face.

He had expected tears and opposition, and he received in

stead, smiles, and apparent acquiescence, and he was surprised and partially thrown off his guard.

"May be the white maiden will go with her Indian lover," said Vinnie. "Give her time to think. It is very hard for her to leave her home and her kind old father. Does the chief think he can make Sun-Hair happier than she has been here? Can he make her forget her father and her home?"

"Did not Ku-nan-gu-no-nah tell the beautiful Sun-Hair that she should be a queen? She shall wear robes as dazzling as the light of the sun. She need not work like the Indian women. She need do nothing but sit and sing like a bird all day long. The red-women will bow their heads in shame before her bright face, and the warriors will sing songs about her beauty. They will think of their beautiful queen when they go on the war-path, and they will always return with the scalps of their dead enemies hanging in their belts. What more can Sun-Hair wish?"

"I think I will go, said the girl, slowly "Only give me time to think."

"Ugh! It is well!" grunted Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, with another of his sickish smiles. Then frowning darkly, and with a significant tap on the handle of his tomahawk:

"But Sun-Hair no fool the chief! If she does he will kill her! She can't get away. Take care!"

The Indian let her free now; and he sat down on a low stool near the door, as if half fearing some treachery on Vinnie's part, but he was pretty well assured, after all, that she would go with him without much resistance. Vinnie stood for some time, striving to think of some plan by which she might escape the Indian, who watched her every motion from under his heavy, overhanging brows, as closely as a cat watches a mouse.

There was such a look of half-suspicious triumph on his dark face and in his cruel eyes as is sometimes seen in the eyes of the panther, as it sits quietly by, watching its prey, and suffering it to live and exult in a few moments more of life than the moment of its annihilation, when it comes suddenly and unlooked for, may be the harder to bear.

But the poor girl rejected plan after plan as impracticable. At one time she thought of making some excuse to

enter an adjoining apartment and secure a pistol which she knew her father kept there; but she feared that the savago would discover her intention and tomahawk her at once. Then she contemplated making a rush for the door at the cabin and escaping into the forest; but her reason told her that the chief would overtake her before she was fairly outside the door.

At last, when she had nearly given up in despair, a thought suggested itself to her brain—how, she never knew, it was so wild and strange—that made her heart leap with a new-born hope—a hope that she might yet outwit her captor and gain time until something—she knew not what—should intervene to save her from the fate he had marked out for her.

She sat down by the table and opened the small box of polished wood, of which mention was made in our first chapter, the Indian watching her the while from his place near the door.

This casket, on being opened, prove to be a small galvanic battery; and Vinnie was but a moment preparing it for action.

When all was in readiness, she took a pair of electric slippers from a drawer in the table and placed them beside the battery.

Then, knowing the superstition of the Indian race, she arose, and waving her hands several times very slowly around her head, seemed to be invoking a charm. Her eyes were fixed apparently on vacancy, and she stood motionless for several minutes; then smiling sweetly, she turned to Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, who had advanced to the center of the room, and stood regarding her mystic performance with a sort of awe and wonder, she said in a low, soft voice, that sounded to him like the murmuring of a distant brooklet:

“Does the chief know that the Great Manitou has given the white maiden a mysterious power, greater than is possessed by any of the Indian medicine-men? Would Ku-nan-gu-no-nah like to see evidence of the white maiden’s power?”

The Indian stood quite still while she was speaking, with a look of mingled doubt and awe on his face. At last he said in his harsh voice:

"Ugh! Let Ku-nan-gu-no-nah see what Sun-Hair can do. She is not a great medicine-woman. There is but one who has a mighty power from the Great Spirit, and that is Yon-da-do, the great conjuror of my tribe. Sun-Hair can't get away. The chief will kill her if she tries. Let Ku-nan-gu-no-nah see!"

"Let the chief look and be convinced!"

Vinnie attached the slippers to the conductors leading from the battery, and set them side by side on the cabin floor.

Then, taking up her position behind the table, she commenced to operate the machine slowly at first, than faster, until the slippers began to skip about, dancing a sort of shuffle, which caused the Indian's face to take on a look of still greater wonder.

"See," she said, turning the little crank faster, causing the magic slippers to jump higher and oftener than before. "Do you longer doubt my power? You, Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, strong brave though you are, can not hold those dancing moccasins when I command them to move!"

The chief's face lighted up in an instant with a look of scorn and contempt. No one had ever doubted his strength before. Surely he could hold those skipping bits of leather.

"Look!" he said. "Let Sun-Hair see the chief hold them so fast they can not tremble."

He stooped down and raised them from the floor, holding one in each hand.

He clutched them firmly, and then went on:

"See the chief hold them. A pappoose could do it. See—"

His words were cut short suddenly, the slippers dropped from his hands, and with a wild shriek of terror, he ran to the further side of the room.

He stood motionless several minutes, his dusky face the picture of blank amazement, looking at the palms of his hands as if he would see what had acted upon them with such powerful effect. He could not conceal his chagrin as Vinnie said, tauntingly:

"Ku-nan-gu-no-nah is a great brave. He is very strong. He can not hold a pair of moccasins. They jump out of his hands, and he runs away like a whipped dog! The big

chief is very strong. What a mighty warrior he must be !”

“ It is a lie !” yelled the Indian, almost beside himself with rage and mortification. “ I *can* hold the dancing moccasins !”

“ Try it,” said the beautiful magician, sententiously. Ku-nan-gu-no-nah advanced timidly, and took the slippers up daintily between his thumbs and fore-fingers.

“ Get a firm hold,” said Vinnie. “ You will need all of your boasted strength. Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, a great chief and a brave warrior, has said that a pappoose could hold the dancing moccasins. Let us see if he can do what a pappoose could do. He says that Sun-Hair has no mysterious power, more terrible than that of the Indian medicine-man, Yon-da-do. He will see. Is he ready ?”

The savage gripped the magic slippers with all his strength, seeming determined that this time he would give the fair conjuror no opportunity to taunt him with lack of success.

“ Ugh !” he grunted, “ Ku-nan-gu-no-nah is ready.”

“ You have them fast now, have you ?”

Vinnie could not repress a smile as he answered, clutching the electric slippers tighter than before :

“ Yes ; they not stir now.”

She muttered a few words in a low tone, passing her hands backward and forward before her face, and commanded the slippers to dance.

At the same instant she set the battery in action, and the chief's hands, acted upon by the electricity, which she had made more powerful than before, seemed to clutch the slippers like a vise.

A horrible expression of mingled rage and pain crossed his distorted face, and he gave utterance to a shrill scream of fear and agony that might have been heard, so loud and resonant was it, fully a mile away.

At last Vinnie ceased to turn the machine, and Ku-nan-gu-no-nah reeled back and sunk down in a corner of the cabin almost exhausted.

His eyes rolled wildly in their sockets, his mouth twitched nervously, his long, coarse black hair stood half-erect, and he trembled with an awful, superstitious fear in every fiber of his being.

"What does the chief think now of the white maiden's power?" asked Vinnie. "What does he think of the little box and the dancing moccasins? Where now is his vaunted strength? Can the great brave do what a pappoose can do? Does he want to try again?"

"No! No!" panted Ku-nan gu-no-nah, with chattering teeth. "Sen-Hair is a great conjuror. She has a power from the Great Spirit! She has a *devil box*, and moccasins such as are worn where the Long-knives go when they die—where there is fire always! Hell, they call it. The white maiden is a greater conjuror than Yon-da-do. She has a *devil-box* and *hell-moccasins*!"

At this moment there were sounds of footfalls outside the door. The noise came nearer, and there was a sharp, scra ching sound on the door like that produced by some keen-pointed instrument.

Vinnie felt a terrible fear forcing its way to her heart.

"My God!" she thought. "What if it should be some of Ku-nan gu no-nah's warriors? Would they show me any mercy after the trick I have played on their chief?"

The scratching noise was repeated, louder than before, and she could see the heavy door tremble. With a white face, she stood awaiting—she knew not what!

The Indian still cowered down in the corner, apparently heedless of what was passing around him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PHANTOM WARRIOR.

BUT it was not fated that Clancy Vere should die by the scalping-knife.

The Indian who had acted as the leader of the party leaped forward with a sharp cry, and with a quick blow of his powerful hand, sent the knife flying from the maddened brave's grasp into the water tossing and roaring twenty feet below.

"What would Bear Killer do?" he said, giving the baffled savage a sudden push that sent him staggering back against the tree. "Has he forgotten the laws of our nation? Does he forget that the great chiefs have said that when a number of warriors take a captive all shall have a share in putting him to death?"

Bear Killer was cowed; but he stood with lowering brows, glowering upon the young hunter with a look of fierce hatred that made him appear, with his dark face bruised and bleeding, absolutely diabolical.

"Wy-an-da is right," he said, at length. "Bear-Killer forgot. The pale-face must die hard! Bear-Killer must be avenged!"

"We will give the white hunter to the laughing waters," said Wy-an-da. "He must die!"

"He must die!"

The four Indians repeated these three ominous words in a hoarse chorus, and began to circle slowly around the captive, brandishing their tomahawks and knives furiously and screaming the wild scalp-halloo of their tribe.

Several minutes passed thus, Vere standing in the circle of screeching braves calm and unmoved; then all became suddenly silent, standing still and dropping their hands by their sides as if moved by a common impulse.

"Is the pale-face ready to die?" asked Wy-an-da.

"I have said that I do not fear death!" replied the young hunter, calmly. "I am ready!"

The last faint ray of hope was extinguished now. He was bound and helpless—they could do with him as they would; and as calmly as possible he resigned himself to his fate—the horrible fate that seemed inevitable!

"Wy-an-da will tell the pale face hunter how he must die," said the chief. "It is not a pleasant death. He will be afraid. His heart will grow small within his bosom and his face will be white as the snow in winter. He will not like to die so. Will he be brave at the last moment?"

"I tell you I am ready to die!" shouted Vere.

He knew that the savage was trying to torture him, and he would not let him see what pain it really gave him—the anticipation of this sudden and terrible departure from the life that had just begun to seem so happy to him.

"Why do you wait?" he added, stolidly. "I tell you I am ready!"

"It is well," said Wy-an-da. "The white hunter is a brave man. He shall die thus: he will be hung by a lasso, head downward, from the branch of that tree there that reaches out over the laughing waters. Then the Indian that can throw his tomahawk the truest will cut the lasso, and the white man will fall down and the laughing waters will sweep him over the rocks. Then his body will be dashed to pieces on the sharp stones below! Is it pleasant to think of? Will the pale-face be brave?"

This speech was greeted by a chorus of satisfied grunts from the savages.

A shudder ran through Vere's frame and his spirits sunk as he heard the chief pronounce his fearful doom; but it was only for a moment. Then he appeared calm and apparently unmoved.

A more diabolical torture could not well be conceived.

It was terrible—this standing face to face with death; but the young hunter showed no signs of fear.

Five minutes later he was swinging, head downward, over that black flood hastening on with a wild roar to the precipice below.

The chill autumn wind, wailing in fitful gusts through the

forest trees, his body gave an oscillating motion, and it seemed, as he swayed at that dizzy height, as if every vibration would precipitate him into the water below.

After the lasso was securely fastened to the protruding branch, the Indians drew back about twenty paces from their swinging victim and prepared for their trial of skill in hurling the tomahawk.

Each was anxious to have the first throw.

At length it was decided that Wy-an-da should have the precedence.

He took his place with a confident air, like one who is assured of success.

Carefully noting the distance, he drew his tomahawk back, and, taking deliberate aim, gave it a quick jerk; and it went whirling out of his hand.

They watched its flight eagerly.

It missed the lasso by six inches.

The swaying hunter was saved thus far.

He had been watching Wy-an-da as he only could look whose life hung on the issue.

He closed his eyes as he saw the weapon whizzing through the air, and awaited the end.

A tall Indian of massive frame stepped forward.

"O-wan-ton try," he said.

He measured the space accurately with his keen eye; but his tomahawk flew wide of its mark, burying itself to the eye in the limb to which the lasso was secured.

The victim of the laughing waters was saved again.

Next came Wolf-Nail.

The young hunter watched him with a white face and a heart wild with despair.

He stepped forward slowly, and hurled his tomahawk without much care.

The swinging cord was a difficult target.

Vere felt the lasso jerk, and thought the end had come.

But he was saved again.

The handle of the tomahawk struck the lasso, and the weapon glanced off and fell with a muffled splash into the water.

Bear-Killer was the last to try.

He was yet half-wild with rage; and with the blood still streaming from his disfigured face, he made ready to hurl his tomahawk, hoping to sate his vengeance and send the young hunter to eternity.

Vere was looking at him, and his heart seemed for a moment to stop its pulsations.

This time death seemed certain.

He saw that the red demon did not intend to throw at the cord.

He was taking deliberate aim at his head!

The young hunter saw him draw back his weapon, and closed his eyes.

There was a moment of terrible agony to the man vibrating, as it were, between earth and eternity—and then all became dark!

He seemed to be shooting down—down—and he knew no more.

He had fainted.

Those few terrible moments of suspense—ages they seemed to him—had been more than he could bear. The constantly tightening noose around his ankles was excruciatingly painful, and the position in which he hung caused the blood to flow to his head. None but a man young and strong like Vere could have retained his consciousness so long as he had done.

Bear-Killer was exultant. A moment more, and his fiend-like longing for vengeance would be satisfied.

He noted the distance carefully with his practiced eye, and with a grim smile of triumph on his bloodstreaked face, raised his tomahawk and prepared to make the fatal throw.

Suddenly a wild, unearthly cry, like a prolonged wail, rang out on the wind, sounding strangely ghastly above its moanings.

Bear-Killer's tomahawk slipped from his grasp, and a sickly pallor overspread his face, and those of his companions blanched to an ashen hue.

The four Indians gave utterance to wild cries of fear and consternation.

"The Spirit Warrior! The Spirit Warrior!"

A white steed was flying across a small opening in the for-

est directly toward them, and mounted upon its bare back, guiding it with neither bridle nor reins, rode a ghastly human skeleton of gigantic proportions.

With cries of terror, the stricken little band of savages turned to fly.

On came the terrible Phantom Rider with the speed of the wind!

As it drew near, it sprang up suddenly, and standing upright on the back of its flying steed, threw something round and black high in the air; then, with another unearthly scream, rode on and disappeared in the forest.

The thing went up with a hissing noise, a broad, brilliant streak of flame marking its course, and then fell with a terrific explosion in the very midst of the Indians.

Then there came a chorus of agonized shrieks, and three of the savages were laid dead on the ground.

Bear-Killer escaped, and fled with a loud, terrified howl into the forest.

The dead Indians were horribly mangled, and Wy-an-da's head was blown a rod from his body.

Then all was silent save the roaring cataract and howling wind.

Not a being was in sight, save the unconscious one who swung by a small cord between this life and the one beyond the grave!

CHAPTER V.

THE MAYBOB TWINS.

EMMETT DARKE went into the forest in search of game; and he was successful, for in an hour's time he had shot and dressed a large buck.

He only took the choicest portions of the deer, which he rolled carefully up in the skin, leaving the remainder to the wolves, panthers, and other beasts of prey that infested the forest. He bound the pelt around the meat he had selected by means of deer-skin thongs through a firmly tied loop, in which he thrust his gun-barrel; and throwing his burden across his shoulder, set out for home.

He was very anxious to reach the cabin; for he could not keep his mind from dwelling on his conversation with Vinnie that afternoon, and he did not like to leave her alone longer than was necessary.

The blood-hound, Death, who had rendered his master valuable service in securing the deer, trotted along after him, as if pleased with the idea of returning to the cabin so soon.

The hunter had proceeded but a short distance, however, when he met with an accident that nearly cost him his life.

As the afternoon advanced, the chill November wind blew harder and colder, till its moanings changed to a fierce roar, and it was evident, even to eyes less accustomed to weather signs than Darke's, that a fearful storm was approaching--one of those cold, gusty rains peculiar to the North-west.

As he was passing a dead oak, whose barkless, decayed trunk and bare, broken branches bore marks of the storms and winds of a hundred years, he was startled by a loud crash overhead.

Looking up, he saw that a fearful gust of wind that just then swept through the wood, blowing the dried leaves and twigs hither and thither and everywhere in wild confusion, had broken off a massive limb, which was falling with lightning velocity directly toward him. Dropping his burden, he

sprung aside, but though the movement saved his life, he did not escape the full force of the blow.

The ponderous mass came whirling down, one end of it striking him on the back of the head.

He reeled and staggered two or three steps, and then sunk down insensible among the fallen leaves.

After surveying his fallen master a minute or two, the blood hound advanced and lay down by his side, as if to keep guard over him. For several minutes he remained in this position, then probably not noting any signs of vitality in the unconscious man, he arose, and, after whining several times in a low key, the sagacious creature took the sleeve of his hunting shirt between his teeth and pulled it gently. This action was repeated several times; and at last, receiving no reply from his master, the faithful dog set out as fast as his feet would carry him for the cabin.

Had he forsaken his master, or gone after assistance?

How long Darke remained unconscious, he knew not.

When consciousness returned, he found himself in a sort of cavern fitted up as a hunter's lodge, apparently, for great piles of skins were to be seen in different parts of the place, and a couple of rifles leaned against the rocky wall at one side, while a small keg, that evidently contained powder, stood near by, half concealed by a deer-skin hunting-shirt, which was thrown carelessly over it, with a bullet-pouch and powder-horn secured to the belt.

He noticed also that the cave was divided into two apartments, for a curtain made of the skins of various wild animals was suspended from a cord overhead.

A dull, hard pain in his head caused him to think of himself, and he now saw, for the first time, that it was bandaged, and he was reclining on a bed made of the pelts of the bear and the panther at one side of the place.

If any further evidence was required to satisfy the hunter that the place was inhabited, it was forthcoming in the shape of a savory odor of broiling venison that was wafted from the inner apartment.

"Where was he? Who had brought him to this place?"

These and many other questions he asked himself, but after five minutes had been consumed in vain conjecture, he was

as far from the solution of the mystery as at the moment when he first awoke to consciousness. He remembered the circumstance of the falling limb in the forest, and after that, all was blank. He did not know when he came, or who had brought him to this place. He was familiar with the country for miles around, he thought, and yet he did not know that there was such a cavern in the vicinity of his cabin.

Of one thing, however, he was assured.

The people who occupied the place must be friendly, else why had they brought him here and cared for him so tenderly?

Soon he heard a voice in the other part of the cave—a coarse, heavy voice, evidently that of a man. It said:

“Give us the whis’, ‘Lon. I guess he’s comin’ round all correct. A good pull at this ‘ll fetch his idee back, I reckon.”

A corner of the curtain was raised, and a man appeared, carrying a small bottle of liquor—so Darke inferred from the words he had just heard.

“Well, stranger, how do you feel?” said he, approaching the hunter. “I reckon you got a right smart of a swat along side yer poll with that ar’ twig out yender. I shouldn’t wonder if it’d ‘a’ splintered when it struck *terry-firmy* if you hadn’t ‘a’ happened along jest in the nick o’ time to break its fall. I was a witness of the lamentationable catastofy, and see the stick when it broke off; but I obsarved that ‘twas bound to fall, and knowin’ I couldn’t stop its wild career, I let it fall; and then started to go to you, but I had to stop and watch that ar’ pup o’ your’n. He’s a nation cute plant, he is, and I reckoned he was a goin’ to snake you home; but af er awhile he give up and started off for help. Then I went out and picked you up and brought you here and laid you out. Here, take a little pull at the whis’. It’ll kinder regulate yer pulse, set yer heart in stidy operation and ile up yer thinkin’ merchine. Don’t say a word. I ain’t ready for you to talk yet, and, besides, I don’t b’lieve as how you’re a nat’ral talker anyhow. Now I’m a nat’ral-born talker. When I was an infant and didn’t weigh but fourteen pounds, my uncle Peter informed my ma that he thought I’d become a preacher or an auctioneer with the proper advantages—and my uncle Peter was a physionologist and a powerful judge of live-stock!”

Darke took the flask, drank some of its contents, and handed it back to the man, whom he had been regarding attentively, from head to foot all the while he had been speaking.

He was very tall—nearer seven feet than six—and his frame was massive in proportion. He was, to judge from his face, which was partially obscured by a thin growth of sandy beard, thirty-five years of age, though one might easily have called him five years older or five years younger. He had pale watery blue eyes; a capacious mouth, from which projected the points of a few large, scraggy teeth; very high and sharp cheek-bones; enormous ears; long, sunken jaws, with hollow cheeks, and a high, sloping forehead, blowing about which, and streaming down his back, were a few long, thin locks of red hair, escaping from beneath the rim of a battered and dirty old silk hat that had once been white, though evidently a good while since.

This ancient tile was secured to the giant's great head by means of a light strap of deer-skin, which was lost to view under his chin among his sparse, bristling whiskers.

He was dressed in a fur garment, part coat, part pantaloons, that enveloped his entire person from his chin to his feet, which were enormously large, and incased in a pair of cow-hide boots that looked, so extensive were they, and at the same time so old, as if they might have seen service, in the removal of the baggage of the patriarchal Noah and his sons and daughters from the family mansion to the ark, when they were compelled to pull up stakes and emigrate at the time of the universal deluge.

"Where am I? Who are you?"

This Darke asked after the "natural talker" had stopped to take breath.

"Why, stranger, or Mr. Darke, I might say—for I've knowed you by sight this four year—you're right here, and safe, I reckon. I've lived here six years, and I've never seen any 'd ginewine ghosts yet. I'm Leander Maybob, formerly of Maybob Center, down in old Massachusetts. If I was real up in etiquette, I s'pose I'd 'a' introduced myself afore; but I ain't polite. Now my uncle Peter was a master polite man. I remember once, when he went down to Bosting to sell his wool—wool was 'way down that season, he lost on that wool

awful—and got kinder turned 'round like. Well, he kept wanderin' all over for a right smart of a while, but he couldn't nohow see his way clear back to the 'Full Bottle Inn'—he was a-puttin' up there. My uncle Peter was a master polite man, and didn't consider it proper to speak to folks as hadn't been introduced to him, and so he kept right on wanderin' about without inquiren' the way till late in the afternoon, when he begun to experience the gnawin' pangs of an empty stummick; and he made up his mind as 'twould be better to be guilty of a breach of politeness than to starve. But he wasn't quite certain, and so he took out his etiquette book—he always carried one, my uncle Peter did, Deacon Checkerfield's, I believe—and looked to see if there was any rules touchin' this very peculiar case o' his'n. Well, he set down on a bar'l in a shed, for 'twas a-rainin' hard by this time, and studied his book till it got so dark he couldn't see to read any longer, and then he concluded to break etiquette or bust. Etiquette was a master fine thing, he argu'd, the very foundation o' society; but 'twasn't hardly the thing for an empty stummick. So he got up and went into a big house right across the way. Here he see a feller as looked kinder nat'ral. 'Pardin,' sez he, 'your countenance looks f'miliar.' He made a master bow as he spoke. 'Will you be so kind as to tell me the way to go to the Full Bottle Inn?' 'Tain't no way in p'tickler', sez the feller. 'Beg pardon,' sez my uncle Peter. He was a master polite man. 'But I want to know how fur 'tis to the Full Bottle Inn?' 'Tain't no distance at all,' sez the feller, 'It's right here.' My uncle give in and begged the feller's pardon—he was a master polite man, my uncle Peter was. He'd been settin' right in front of the inn for hours studyin' his etiquette book, cause he didn't know nobody to ask. He didn't tell of it for five years afterward."

At this moment the curtain which divided the cavern was pushed back at one side, and another person advanced toward Darke and his Titanic companion.

He came and stood by Leanter Maybob, and the hunter looked from one to the other in astonishment.

He was scarcely four feet in hight, the top of his head barely reaching the giant's waist.

His apparel resembled that of his more portly companion, with the exception of the covering for the head and feet.

The dwarf's round little pate was surmounted by a grotesquely broad-brimmed wool hat, and he appeared, as his small keen eyes flashed quick, nervous glances about, not unlike the traditional "toad under a cabbage-leaf," while his lower extremities were adorned by a pair of nicely-fitting deer-skin moccasins.

"He's my little brother," the giant said, by way of introduction. "We're the Maybob twins. We ain't much alike you see. He's a little mite of a feller, and I'm big enough to be his daddy; he's dumb—can't speak a word—and I'm a nat'ral talker. Now uncle Peter said as how he thought 'twasn't hardly fair, makin' me so big and so complete in every way, and him so little and scarce; but says daddy, says he—and he was a univarsal smart man daddy was—says he it's all in the family, and they'll both together make a couple of middlin' good-sized men—they'll about average, and it's all in the family. My little brother's name's Alonphilus. But if we're different in sich respects, we're alike as fur as the one great principle of our lives goes. Ain't we, 'Lon?"

There was a scintillant glow in the dwarf's little black eyes as he nodded assent.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT IN THE STORM.

TREMBLING herself with a fear all the more terrible because of its vagueness and uncertainty, and with her beautiful face pale as death, Vinnie stood and watched the trembling of the heavy main door, as the scratching noise was repeated for a third time.

The sound was louder, more imperative than before.

The chief seemed suddenly to arouse from the state of frightened inactivity into which he had fallen, and rising on his feet, walked, or rather staggered, toward the shaking door.

He seemed to have lost all his strength, for he reeled across the floor like a drunken man.

For two or three minutes the sound was not repeated, and Vinnie and the savage stood waiting with bated breath.

They had not long to wait.

Again came that harsh, grating sound, as though some one was digging the point of a knife, or some other hard, sharp instrument into the door.

Almost simultaneously with this noise, came a long, low whine, evidently that of a brute.

Vinnie started.

The look of wild fear left her face, and she advanced toward the door, while the low wail was repeated in a louder key and more prolonged than before.

She gave utterance to a glad exclamation.

"It is *Death*!"

It was evident in a moment that Kuman-gu-no-zah, also, had discovered the cause of the strange sounds.

He seemed to gain new strength.

"It is the dog!" he said harshly, laying hold of the girl's hand, just as she was about to open the door to admit Death.

Vinnie nodded.

"He is large and strong," continued the chief, "and his teeth are like the points of knives!"

She knew her power over his untutored, superstitious mind, and she was no longer afraid.

She nodded again and said:

"Yes, he is very strong, and his teeth are like needles. If he sets them into an Indian's flesh he will die. Shall I let him in to you? His name is Death!"

The savage gripped her hand tighter.

"No," he said, with evident alarm. "San-Hair must not let the dog in."

Giving her a quick, sudden pull, he drew her across the room and through the other apartment to a rear door.

Her face changed color and she tried to release herself from his hold, but without avail.

Here he unhanded her, and went back and closed the door between the two rooms. Barring it securely he returned, and laying his heavy hand on her shoulder, he bent over till his dark face almost touched hers, and fairly hissed through his set teeth:

"San-Hair has a mighty power from the great Manitou. She has escaped Ku nan-gu-no-nah this time, with her devil-box; but let her beware! If the dog could get at the chief he would kill him, but Ku nan-gu-no-nah is safe. Before San-Hair can open both doors he will be away in the forest. Let the pale face medicine-woman beware!"

Vinnie did not try to detain him. She could not. All the time he had been speaking, his hard, bony fingers were closed on her shoulder like an iron vise.

He let go his hold suddenly, and an instant later was running across the little open space at the rear of the cabin.

Vinnie saw him disappear among the trees, and then turned and opened the door that led into the other apartment.

In a moment she had undone the fastenings of the other one, and the blood hound sprung into the cabin.

He stopped before Vinnie, and looking up into her face, gave utterance to a long, low whine.

She patted his head and caressed him, but he would not be satisfied.

Still whining piteously he turned, and with his red eyes fixed on her face walked toward the door.

She did not heed this mute appeal.

He turned again and going up to her, took hold of her dress with his teeth and pulled it quietly.

"Why, Death, old fellow!" she said, caressing the sagacious brute again. "What is the matter? Where is your master?"

When she mentioned her father the dog pulled harder at her dress, almost pulling her along toward the door.

A wild fear seemed suddenly to force its way to her heart. There was only one way in which she could account for the strange demeanor of the dog.

Surely something must have happened to her father!

She was sure of this when she remembered a story that he had told her once, about the blood-hound's saving her life when she was a child of five or six.

The chill wind was blowing harder than when the hunter set out from the cabin, and the black, angry clouds, hanging low in the sky, threatened momentarily to open and shower down the cold, half-frozen November rain over the earth.

Suddenly, while Vinnie looked out, there came a fierce gust of wind tearing through the great oaks and rattling their heavy leafless branches against the walls of the cabin.

Twigs and leaves were flying in wild confusion through the air, and it was growing darker every moment.

"A wild and fearful storm is approaching," said the girl, shudderingly; "but I must not hesitate. My father is in danger—may be he is—"

She paused a breath, as if fearful to say the word; and then went on: "Maybe he is dead!"

The dog was tugging at her dress again.

"Yes," she said, in reply to his dumb, eager look. "Yes, I am going. Come!"

And shutting the door after her, she followed her brut guide out into the storm, which had now begun to fall, and away through the forest till they arrived at the place where the hunter had met with the accident from the falling limb a short time before.

Here the dog stopped, and after sniffing about for a moment, readily found the trail which the giant hunter had made as he carried Darke away to the cavern, where we left him at the close of our last chapter

Then he turned, and pulling again at Vinnie's dress, trotted slowly away on the track he had just discovered.

The storm had been steadily increasing, and it had been growing darker all the time, till the forest was indescribably somber and gloomy.

The brave girl did not shrink; but drawing a blanket she had thrown around her on leaving the cabin closer about her slender form, to shield her in a measure from the sleet that dashed against her person, cutting almost like a knife, she pushed on after the blood hound, increasing her speed to keep up with him.

By and by Death stopped suddenly at the foot of a steep, rocky acclivity.

He seemed, all at once, to have lost the trail.

Vinnie drew her blanket closer about her face and shoulders, and crouching close up against the trunk of a large tree, watched him eagerly.

He ran back and forth several times along the base of the acclivity, searching for the lost trail; then paused at last, with a quick, glad yelp, before a large rock that, almost hidden by the thick overhanging shrubbery along the hillside, seemed to be firmly imbedded in the earth. Then for several minutes he made no sign.

Had he lost the trail again?

He whined, and began to scratch away at the earth about the bottom of the boulder.

Vinnie, at a loss to account for his strange behavior, drew the blanket up over her head, and creeping closer up under the friendly shelter of the great tree-trunk, looked on in wonder.

It did not occur to her that the flat stone might conceal the entrance to the cavern beyond—for she was indeed at the opening that led into the place where Lianter Maybobb, the giant hunter, had carried her father but a little while before.

Soon the blood hound stopped digging, and sat down, with another long, low whine, keeping his red eyes fixed immovably on the dark surface of the rock before him.

"What can it mean?" Vinnie asked herself. "He does not search for the trail any longer. Why does he stop here? What is there about that rock? I wonder if it is immova-

ble. Perhaps it covers the trail some way. I am going to attempt to move it. It looks very ponderous. It must be very heavy."

She examined the boulder closely, but could see nothing to indicate that it had ever been stirred from the place where it seemed so firmly imbedded into the earth.

She laid hold of a corner that appeared to project more than any other portion of the rock, and pulled with all her strength.

The stone remained immovable. Of what avail were her weak little hands?

"I can not stir it," she said. "It is as firmly fixed as masonry. I am not strong enough."

When the dog saw that she was trying to remove the boulder, he recommenced scratching at the dirt at its base, giving utterance ever and anon to quick, glad yelps.

She tried once more; but her second efforts were as unavailing as her first.

"It is no use," she said, half to herself and half to the blood-hound. "I can not stir it. But what does it mean? In what manner does it cover the trail? It does, somehow; or Death would surely pick it up and follow on. What a fearful storm! I never saw one like it before. How the sleet cuts my face and hands!"

And she shrunk back into her old shelter.

The dog kept his place before the boulder, from which he never removed his eyes till his quick ear caught a strange sound, which even Vinnie heard plainly above the roar of the storm.

Following the direction of the brute's gaze, the girl saw a sudden and unexpected sight.

Some one was approaching on a white horse.

She cowered down out of sight behind the tree-trunk and watched. The storm half blinded her; but she could see that it was a man, and that something, wrapped in a thick, black cloth, hung limp and helpless across the horse before him. It was like a human being. Was it alive or dead?"

CHAPTER VII.

OVER THE PRECIPICE!

Ten minutes—ten—thirty—sixty, dragged slowly by, and Clancy knew naught of them. All this time he had hung by a cord between this life and the next; but he comprehended it not. He was still insensible.

The wind increased in force until it swayed the great tree from which he was suspended, and swung him backward and forward, pendulum-like, over the turbid, rearing flood below.

Still he knew it not.

Near by a little, dark form, with great fiery eyes and ravenous jaws drew its dark length out of the cover of a thicket near by, and creeping stealthily along the ground, ascended the tree, and crouched menacingly on a branch directly above him.

It was a panther.

For ten minutes the terrible brute eyed him with its red, fiery eyes, and then, settling further back on its haunches, prepared to pounce upon him.

Still he knew not his peril!

Closer down on the branch of the tree crouched the panther, its great red eyes seeming fairly to blaze, while its long tail waved to and fro, lashing first one of its sleek, shining sides and then the other.

It was all ready to spring—in an instant it would dart from its perch on the limb and shoot like an arrow down upon its swaying prey: every muscle of its little body was contracted. One breath—and then?

There was a dull, cutting sound, as a tense-drawn bow-string was jerked straight, and a long, slender arrow came whizzing out of a copse near at hand, and, pierced to the heart, the panther rolled off of the limb and fell quivering to the ground at the very moment when its victim seemed so secure and its triumph so complete. Its powerful limbs straightened out, and the ravenous brute was dead.

In a moment a form emerged stealthily from the thicket and crept across the opening to the foot of the tree

It was Bear-Killer !

His ugly face still bled from the effects of the kick he had received from the young hunter a couple of hours before. His purpose in returning so soon to the scene of his late discomfiture and the death of his companions, is easily surmised when the reader remembers that he was as vindictive and **vengeful as a fiend.**

He gave the panther a kick with the toe of his moccasin, and saw at once that it was quite dead.

"The panther would cheat the red man out of his revenge," he said, savagely. "It must not be so. Nothing can save him now. He must die ! The revenge of Bear-Killer is near at hand. **The white hunter's time has come.**"

As the Indian ceased speaking, he drew his tomahawk, and stepped back a few paces where his aim at the head of the swinging and senseless young hunter would be true and certain.

He noted the distance accurately with his practiced eye, and poised his weapon.

"How quick he will die !" he muttered. "How easy **Bear-Killer will slay him !**"

"Bear-Killer will not slay him !" said a deep voice, close at his side ; and a heavy hand was laid on his arm, so suddenly and with such force that the tomahawk fell from his grasp and half buried itself among the leaves at his feet.

Bear-Killer turned with a sharp grunt of rage and surprise. His mutilated face expressed nothing, but his small, baleful eyes scintillated like those of a cowed and baffled wolf.

The hand on his arm tightened its hold, and the deep, stern voice repeated authoritatively :

"Bear-Killer will not slay him !"

The speaker was an Indian, tall and massive in build, and manifestly the superior of Bear-Killer in strength.

His dress and equipments indicated him to be a chief. Bear-Killer seemed to recognize his superiority, either of rank or strength, or both.

It was Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, who had but just now made his escape from the cabin of Emmett Darke, and the terrible

power which he believed Vinnie possessed ; and he was making his way back through the forest toward the Indian village, when he discovered Bear-Killer in the act of consummating his dreadful vengeance on the unconscious white man.

Ku-man-gu-no-nah recognized this white man at a glance.

He knew it was Clancy Vere.

And he had particular reasons for not wishing Bear-Killer to become his slayer.

Perhaps his chief reason was that he wanted to put the young hunter to death himself.

He was aware that Clancy Vere was his successful rival in the affections of Vinnie Darke, or Sun-Hair, as he was wont to call her.

Jealous and vindictive as he was, this was sufficient to make him hunt his pale-faced rival to the ends of the earth, if he could not compass his death without.

Many times when he had seen Clancy go to the hunter's cabin, had he vowed in his fierce, jealous rage to kill him, but something had heretofore always intervened to baffle him ; but now he was exultant. The time for which he had so long waited had come. The young hunter was bound and insensible in his power. He asked nothing more. His triumph seemed almost complete. His discomfitures and rebuffs at Vinnie's hands that afternoon had more than ever determined him to wreak vengeance on her lover, since he stood in too wholesome awe of the lovely magician to think for a moment of again attempting to obtain forcible possession of her person—at least not at present.

With a sudden movement, Bear-Killer wrenched himself free from the chief's grasp, and faced him half angrily, at the same time picking up the tomahawk out of the leaves at his feet.

"Why does the chief interfere?" he asked.

"Because," said Ku-man-gu-no-nah, "he would slay the pale face hunter himself. He has cause for revenge!"

"And has not Bear-Killer cause for revenge?" the Indian almost yelled. "Look at his face! Yonder white man did this. The pain is like a thousand tortures. What says the chief? Has he greater cause for revenge than Bear-Killer?"

"The chief has greater cause for revenge than Bear-Killer," said Ku-nan-gu-no-nah.

"He has not!" said the Indian, decisively. "Bear-Killer will not be cheated out his vengeance! He saved the pale-face from the panther that he might kill him himself!"

"And the chief has saved him from the vengeance of Bear-Killer that *he* might have *his* revenge!" said Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, with a grim, devilish smile. "Let the warrior wait, and he shall see the vengeance of a chief."

He advanced toward the tree; and, as he neared it, his gaze fell on the dead and horribly mangled bodies of the savages who had fallen before the terrible charge of the Phantom Rider.

The undergrowth had concealed them from his view until now.

He started back with a loud cry of surprise and wonder.

"Did he do it?" he asked, pointing toward the swaying white man.

"No," said Bear-Killer, in a voice that was half a gasp. "No; it was—"

"Who then?" interrogated the chief, in an awed whisper.

"The Spirit Warrior."

"*The Spirit Warrior!*"

The chief reiterated the words in a dazed sort of way, like one under some subtle spell, while for an instant a shudder seemed to convulse his massive frame, causing it to shake like an aspen.

"Yes," said Bear-Killer, "it was the Spirit Warrior—the spirit of the outcast chief, Meno. When will Meno's vengeance be complete?"

"When Ku-nan-gu-no-nah and all his braves are no more! When the sons of the red-men who tortured their own chief to death are all numbered with the dead! Then, and not before, will the vengeance of the outcast and murdered sachem, Meno, be complete. Every day brings it nearer the end!"

The two Indians started as though a keen-edged knife had pierced their vitals. Then they stood transfixed with fear,

staring into each other's eyes as if to inquire the source of the answer that had come to Bear-Killer's question almost before it had left his lips.

The tones of the voice that had spoken the words were hollow, and the weird and terrible menace seemed to be borne to them on the winds from afar off, in a wild, ghastly chant that thrilled every fiber of their superstitious beings with a vague horror that they could not shake off.

The dismal wailing of the wind through the forest trees, the sullen roar of the storm which had set in a little while before, and the monotonous dashing of the cataract below, all combined to inspire them with a sort of awed dread, that the spirit voice, crying out to them above the crash of the wind and storm, augmented into a wild, ungovernable fear.

For several moments, the two Indians stood silent and motionless, neither daring to speak or stir.

For a few seconds the wind was hushed and the dashing storm seemed to have spent its fury.

Then in an instant it seemed as if the storm demon had sent forth all his forces of wind and sleet. Trees were blown over, limbs were flying hither and thither, and the wind increased to a perfect tornado, wailing and shrieking like a regiment of fiends. The Indians saw that the white man was swinging to and fro at a fearful rate. It seemed as though the lasso must break at every oscillation. He vibrated backward through a space of fully twenty feet. They could not keep their footing, and were obliged to throw themselves prostrate on the ground.

High above the fearful roar, and crashing of uprooted trees and fallen limbs, loud and clear above the shrieking of the wind, was borne to them again the voice of Meno, the Spirit Warrior:

"Let Ku-nan-gu-no-nah beware! Meno's vengeance will overtake him. He will die a more horrible death than even his devilish mind can comprehend! Let him beware!"

The two Indians remained motionless upon the earth, trembling at every joint. Although giant trees were being uprooted on every hand and massive limbs were falling all around them, they were unharmed.

Clancy Vere's peril was imminent.

The tree, from a branch of which he was suspended, groaned and cracked under the force of the storm, threatening momentarily to break loose from its place in the bank and go crashing over the precipice.

Even if the stout roots remained firm in their hold on the earth, the cord by which he hung was liable to be jerked asunder at any oscillation of his body; and he would shoot headlong down into the seething flood underneath and be swept to destruction over the waterfall below.

A quarter of an hour passed, during which the two savages did not arise from their recumbent position and the spirit voice did not again speak.

The tree remained firm and the lasso seemed to deride all attempts on the part of the tempest to break it. It would crack, but it would not part.

Thus far, Clancy Vere had been saved; but he was still unconscious, and had not realized the terrible danger that had menaced him.

Soon the storm began to abate somewhat.

Ku-nan-gu-no-nah and Bear-Killer got upon their feet by-and-by, when the fury of the storm was in a measure spent.

Their sharp sense of hearing had been keenly alert to catch any further words from the Spirit Warrior. But they did not hear the terrible, menacing voice again.

"It has gone," said the chief.

"Yes," assented Bear-Killer, in a tone of relief. "We shall hear it no more to-day. It went away on the storm."

"The vengeance of Meno is terrible!" said the chief, with a shudder. "But we are safe now. Now for my revenge!"

"Stop," said Bear-Killer. "We will draw lots. I, too have come here for vengeance on the white hunter."

The chief grunted a guttural and very unwilling compliance to this proposition.

"We must hurry," he said, "or he will be dead. He is almost dead now."

Bear-Killer made a very small mark on the trunk of the tree.

"The one that throws his tomahawk the nearest to the mark wins," said he.

They took their places almost on the verge of the high bluff on which they were standing.

Ku-nan-gu-no-nah threw first.

His tomahawk buried itself in the tree-trunk, within half an inch of the mark.

There was a baleful glow in Bear-Killer's wolfish eyes as he poised his weapon, a treacherous glitter that the chief did not fail to notice. Just as the handle of the tomahawk was slipping out of his grasp, the chief dealt him a powerful blow on the side of the head. He staggered a moment and his body swayed to and fro as he tried to regain his balance on the very edge of the bank. The next instant his wild death-yell came up from below !

CHAPTER VIII

THE GIANT'S STORY.

DARKE noted the angry flash in the dwarf's little black eyes, as he nodded an eager assent to his brother's strange question, and wondered not a little what the "one great purpose" of this queerly assorted pair's lives was; but he forebore to question the giant, not doubting that, if it was not some secret that they did not wish to disclose, he would explain himself in good time. And this belief was not far from correct, as the giant hunter's next words attested. He sat down on a stool near at hand; and as Alonphilus came and stood at his side, he said:

"Yes; wer'e livin' for some purpose. We have given our lives up to revenge! Wer'e a-gittin' revenge every day, hain't we, 'Lon?"

The dwarf's round little pate was bent forward again until Darke just caught the glitter of the dusky eye under the broad rim of his slouch hat; and this he interpreted to be a token of assent to the giant's question. As his face was raised to view again, he thought he saw the dwarf's mute lips move, as if in an attempt to speak, and he imagined that volumes of vindictive, vengeful words were struggling for utterance. But the dumb tongue was incapable of expressing even a tithe of the dark passion that was written on every lineament of the pigmy's face.

"And we've anuff to be revenged for, God knows!" Leander Maybod went on. "We can't never wipe out of our memories our old father and mother that the red devils murdered in cool blood; we can't never forgit the awful sight our eyes rested onto, when we came home from a hunt one morning; we can't never wipe this out of our minds. But, the just God helpin' us, we'll wipe every one of their murderers off o' the earth before we die! The devil that led them shall die a more horrible death than even his own hellish mind has planned for his poor helpless victims! We've done

a deal t'ward fulfillin' our vow in the past six years; eh, 'Lon? We've made many a savage bite the dust in that time!"

The dwarf's hand darted into the bosom of his hairy vestment; it came out again in an instant, and he held up to Darke's view a deer-skin string about four feet in length, which was knotted almost from one end to the other.

He touched each knot in succession with the forefinger of his right hand, accompanying every motion with a nod of the head.

"There's just a hundred an' forty-eight knots," said the big hunter; "and every one on 'em is a red-skin's eppytoph!"

That slender strip of deer-skin, simple and harmless as it appeared, told a ghastly story of conflict and of death and of half-sated vengeance!

"We'll git our hands on him yet," the big hunter went on. "We've had chances to kill him often enough; but jest a common death ain't enough fer him. He deserves more; an' I want to give him his jest desarts. He must die an awful death! Our vengeance 'll overhaul him yet, 'Lon. Then you may tie a double knot! We'll give him two vases to his eppytoph; eh, 'Lon?"

The dwarf nodded, touched the hilt of his hunting-knife significantly, and made motions as if to tie a knot in the string which he still held in his hand.

"Of whom do you speak?" queried Darke, as he supported himself on his elbow.

"The red fiend that led the attack on our cabin! The devil that shot my mother and carried my old father's war-scap away in his belt! Hain't we got reason plenty fer vengeance? Do ye wonder that we hunt and kill Indians as you would kill serpints? Do ye think it's strange that we don't want to let that red imp die a common way?"

The big hunter had arisen while he spoke, drawing his Titanic form up to its full height. The expression on his face was terrible to look upon. As he finished, he brought his ponderous clenched fist down, striking it in the horny palm of his other hand.

Drake half shuddered.

"No—no!" he cried. "No death—no torture on earth is

horrible enough to be meet punishment for the atrocities of such a fiend incarnate! Is he an Indian chief?"

The giant nodded. His ungovernable rage seemed to have entirely spent itself, and he did not speak; but stood with folded arms and downcast eyes, his massive frame as motionless as though carved out of the solid rock around them.

Alonphilus seemed to partake keenly of this feeling of un-lying, inveterate hatred of the Indians. His face wore a hard, implacable look, and he kept drawing the record of their vengeance slowly through his fingers from one hand to the other, as if he longed to tie the short end of it that was yet unmarked by the little death register into one great hard knot, that could never be entangled, in commemoration of the passage from this life to the next of the murderer of his parents and the triumphant consummation of their terrible work of vengeance.

The spell that was on the big hunter was only momentary, and it was but a minute or two before he was himself again; and he signified his willingness to resume the conversation by saying, as he reseated himself on the stool at the side of the couch of skins on which Darke reclined:

"Well, I heerd Elder Ingwoller say onc't—and he was college l'arnt—'It's a long tow-path, or cow-path, or suthin', as hasn't got no turns into 'em;' and I believe it's true as gospil."

The dwarf turned and walked across the cavern, and pushing aside the dividing curtain, disappeared within the inner apartment, replacing the death record in his bosom as he did so.

"The day of retribution is sure to come at last. It is not often that the guilty escape punishment," said Darke. "It is sure to overtake them sooner or later. God's justice is certain!"

"I'm a-thinkin'," returned Leander Maybob, "as how Ku-nan-gu-no-nah's tow path or cow-path 'll take a mighty unexpected turn some day!"

"Ku-nan-gu-no-nah!"

The big hunter seemed surprised at Darke's sudden exclamation.

"Yes," he said, "that's the devil's name. Do you know him? Have you got an account ag'in' him?"

"Yes," cried Darke, sitting bolt upright on the couch, while a hard, stern look settled on his face. "Yes; I believe I have. And I am going to present it for settlement the very first time I see him!"

"What do you mean?" the other asked, evincing no small degree of interest in the words and actions of Darke. "Has he ever—"

"I'll tell you," interrupted Darke. "Then you'll understand how it is. We—I mean Vinnie, my motherless daughter, and myself—live alone in our little cabin. There is no one to keep us company and no one that I can leave with her when, as I am often compelled to do, I go in search of game out into the woods. Sometimes I am absent a whole day together; but I never stay away over night. Some time last summer, while Vinnie was wandering through the edge of wood that skirts our little clearing, Ku-nan-gu-no-nah saw her and conceived the idea of making her his wife. Always choosing times when I was away, he has several times come to my cabin; trying to persuade Vinnie to go with him to his wigwam and become his squaw. He has never offered her violence, but the last time, failing to induce her to do as he wished, he threatened to abduct her and bear her away to the Indian village. I have left her a pistol to be used as a protector, and she has not been brought up on the frontier without learning how to handle it. I am staying away to-day, I fear, longer than I ought to. I hope I shall be able to go home soon. How long is it since you brought me here? I begin to feel stronger, as if I could walk easily enough now. Have I been here long, did you say?"

"I lugged ye in here som'eres about the middle of the a'ternoon," replied the other, "and it's purty near night now. 'Lon's comin' back with the glims now. You've b'en here som'eres about three or four hours. D'ye b'lieve yer fit to travel now?"

"Yes," said Darke. "I think all my strength has come back. I do not feel weak or faint; but my head aches terribly—that's all. I must go."

The dwarf entered at this juncture, bearing four or five

pitch-pine torches, which he lighted and stuck into niches in the rocky walls of the cavern.

"I s'pose ye calkilate to shoot him?" said Leander Maybob, eagerly. "I s'pose ye'll kill him. 'Twould only jest be in the natur' of things for ye to do so; but I wish ye wouldn't. I wish ye wouldn't harm a hair of his head. Ye see he can't die only onc't; and if you kill him he won't suffer only one death. If we wipe him out, he'll hev to die a hundred deaths in one! If ye jest load a gun in the common way and fire it off, that's all there is of it; but if ye puts in a good many loads and rams 'em down good till ye've got it chuck full cl'ar to the muzzle, and then manage some way to git out of danger and gives the trigger a leetle jerk, why then ye'll bu'st the 'tarnal thing. Ye see when we tech Kunnan-gu-no-nah off, we calkilate to bu'st him. I wish ye'd jest let us pay it all off together—your score and our own. What d'ye say?"

"You know a man always feels better for taking his own revenge," said Darke. "It's more satisfactory."

"Yes, I know 'tis," replied the big hunter. "I know 'tis, and I wouldn't nohow let any man take our job outen our hands; but when I tell ye our story, I believe ye'll agree as we're the ones that ought to have the prime chance at Kunnan-gu-no-nah. If I'll tell it to ye, ye'll jest give the subjick a few minutes thort, won't ye?"

"I should like very much to hear your story," said Darke; "and I'll consider what you have proposed."

It is unnecessary that we should follow Leander Maybob through the somewhat tedious length of recital, during which he made many pauses and numerous repetitions; but we will give the reader the substance of his sad story.

The giant hunter had, with his dwarf brother and his parents, considerably advanced in life, come from the East seven years years before, and erected a pioneer's cabin at a place down the river twenty or twenty five miles from their cavern lodge. They commenced making a little clearing, and for several months all went well; although the Indians made almost daily visits to their forest home, they never molested any thing or offered any violence. The days went by and they began to fancy themselves secure from any harm

from the savages. But they put too much faith in their treacherous natures. When Darke heard how a band of the dusky fiends, led by Ku nan-gu-no-nah, attacked the old settler's cabin one dark, stormy night in the absence of his sons—when he heard how the stout hearted, gray-haired old man and his feeble wife had been driven out, after defending their cabin and their lives gallantly for nearly two hours, by the flames which were devouring their little log home, whose rough walls had warded off the Indians' bullets, which had rattled harmlessly from their sides; how they had been butchered as they came out from the roaring, crackling flames—when the giant avenger told him with a moisture suffusing his eyes of the return next morning of himself and Alonphilus and the heart-sickening sight they beheld; when he heard all this, he could not wonder that these strange brothers had taken a solemn and fearful vow to avenge their parents' death. He knew that their claim on the life of the chief was greater than his; so he said, as he arose from the couch—for he was much stronger now:

"I will promise you this. Unless I find it absolutely necessary to protect myself or mine, I will try to forego my revenge on Ku-nan-gu-no-nah and leave him to your disposal. Is this satisfactory? I believe you have a better right to kill him than I."

"Thank ye!" said the big hunter, grasping Darke's hand and squeezing it almost painfully in his bony fingers. "Thank ye, Mr. Darke. It seems as how I can't thank ye enough!"

"Never mind the thanks," said Darke. "I am your debtor. You took me in when—"

"There! that'll do," interrupted Leander. "Come."

As he ceased speaking, he turned and led the way into the inner apartment of the cavern.

Darke felt quite well now, with the exception of an acute pain in his head, and he followed his strange entertainer with no difficulty whatever.

The place where he now found himself resembled the outer cavern a good deal, only it was much smaller and contained a sort of rude fireplace, on the hearth of which a bright fire was blazing merrily, sending showers of sparks up a narrow

fissure that served as an outlet for the smoke; in short, it was a natural chimney, and could not have answered its purpose better had it been built up of stone and mortar in the usual way. Another small apartment was curtained off from this in the same manner that the two larger apartments of the cavern were separated from each other, only the curtain of pelts was closely drawn, as if special pains had been taken to shut out the interior from the view of any one in the other part of the cave.

The big hunter motioned Darke to a seat on the stool near the fire, and then, followed by the dwarf, passed into this smaller room, if such it might be called, carefully closing the curtain behind him. Soon Darke heard him say something in a subdued tone that he could not understand. A moment later he caught a few words that caused him to wonder greatly. Evidently there was a mystery connected with the little apartment. He heard the rough voice of the big hunter say :

"Does he show any signs of life yet? Can't be he's dead!"

The next moment they returned, but the giant offered no explanation of the mystery, whatever it was, and Darke thought best to act as though he had not overheard the strange words quoted above. A large oaken chest stood nearly in the center of the place; and on its lid Alonphilus had arranged a savory supper of broiled venison.

The brothers each drew a stool up by the side of this strange table, and Leander invited Darke cordially to do the same.

After he had partaken of the food so hospitably proffered by his new-found friends, he announced his intention to depart at once for home. The big hunter told him that it was already growing dark outside, and he knew that he must have been away from Vinnie at least five hours, now; and he feared that she would grow uneasy if he did not return soon.

He thanked the twin avengers for their kindness and was about to go, when he saw Alonphilus raise one end of the chest as if to carry it to some other part of the cavern. He stood close at hand, and he laid hold of the other handle to assist the dwarf in its removal.

They had gone but a few paces, however, when Alonphilus

tripped and fell, dropping his part of the burden to the ground; and the sudden jar caused the other handle to slip from Darke's grasp. The chest overturned, the cover flying back as it did so, and its contents rolled out at the woodman's feet with a weird, ghastly rattle as it struck the rocky floor. Darke, strong, brave man though he was, started back with a quick, sharp cry of alarm.

White and terrible at his feet, lay *a grinning, horrible skeleton of gigantic proportions!*

"Our secret! Our secret!" cried the big hunter, hoarsely
"You hev diskivered our secret!"

CHAPTER IX.

LOST IN THE FOREST.

SRILL crouching down by the great tree-trunk at the entrance of the cavern lodge of the Maybob twins, in whose care her father, of whom the reader recollects she came out in search, was at that very moment, though she knew it not, and had no knowledge of the cave itself, Vinnie watched, as best she might, through the blinding storm, the approach of the rider of the white horse and his mysterious burden. Death, desisting for a moment from his persistent pawing of the earth at the base of the rock that had defied the girl's weak attempts at removal a few minutes before, came, and standing close beside her, poked his sharp nose out through the bushes that grew thick around the foot of the tree, and watched with his keen eyes the horseman, who was coming nearer every moment.

She could not see the man's face very distinctly, for he wore a wide, slouch hat that, when he bent far forward on his horse, to prevent the sleet from beating into his eyes and mouth, almost entirely concealed it from view.

But the mysterious burden that he carried before him was plainly visible, and seemed, perhaps because of its very mystery, to have a sort of weird fascination for her.

She could not see the object, itself; it was so closely rolled in and so carefully protected from the driving storm by the heavy black wrap that entirely enveloped it from head to foot—for she had firmly determined that it was a human form. Only one question remained unsolved in her mind now.

“Was it alive or dead?”

While she yet pondered on this mystery, and with her eyes on the horseman, every thing—the white horse—its rider—the man or woman, or corpse, that he had carried before him—whatever it was that was hidden from sight so effectually within the folds of that pall—she could not believe it was

any thing else—while yet she saw him coming toward the place of her concealment, all vanished from her sight as suddenly and as surely as though the earth had opened and swallowed them up.

She uttered a little cry of consternation. Then she rubbed her eyes and looked again.

But there was nothing there, where the man and the horse and that other *thing* had been, only the falling storm, still raging with all its fury.

What could it mean?

She asked herself this question shudderingly, while, in her fear, she clung around the neck of her great brute companion, glad in the terror that possessed her of the company which he, dumb animal though he was, could be to her.

The blood-hound had never, for an instant, removed his gaze from the place where the mysterious horseman, with his black burden, had so unaccountably disappeared a few moments before; and while Vinnie's arms were yet around his neck he tore himself from her embrace and darted out of sight among the shrubbery that grew dense and heavy about the spot.

Vinnie called to him repeatedly, but he did not come back. She waited, then called again and again with a like result. The dog did not come; nor could she hear him beating about the undergrowth.

Had he deserted her?

She would not believe it; and she cried again, her voice almost losing itself in the roar of the storm:

"Death! Death! Death, come back! Here, Death—good old fellow! Come back!"

Again she waited and listened

The wind and storm were all the sounds she heard.

Then it seemed to come to her all at once that she was alone. Even her brute protector had deserted her.

All alone in the tempest that was raging through the forest like a thousand furies!

"He has gone!" she quavered, hugging the tree-trunk closer, as a gust of wind wilder than any before swept through the forest, uprooting a large sycamore not far away, and blowing the covering off from her head; letting the sleet

dash in its sharp, cutting way into her face. "He is gone," she repeated with slow iteration, "and I am all alone!"

She thought of returning to the cabin; but she dared not face the storm. It was almost certain death to attempt to make her way home with the storm at its height and while trees were falling almost constantly, and branches flying hither and thither all the time, crashing through the tree-tops and whirling in mid-air as though they had been but feathers instead of massive pieces of wood.

She dared not venture out of her shelter. So she shrunk back as far as possible and waited. Perhaps the storm would abate somewhat after a while. She hoped it would; and this was her one bit of comfort.

In an hour's time the tempest seemed to have spent its fury. The wild roar of the wind had dwindled to a low, mournful moaning, and the sleet had ceased to fall; but the rain fell in a slow, monotonous drizzle that seemed likely to continue through the night.

The afternoon was now very far advanced, but it lacked more than an hour of nightfall.

Vinnie arose to her feet now, and walked slowly back, as nearly as she could find her way, over the trail she had come. She followed it without much difficulty for a short distance, but by and by when she lost sight of the indistinct pathway that led away from the cavern, she was obliged to be guided solely by her judgment of what direction she ought to take to reach her father's cabin.

For nearly an hour she kept on, picking her way through the thick undergrowth, and climbing over fallen trees and heaps of the *debris* of the storm which was scattered through the length and breadth of the forest. It was beginning to grow dark, and the cold November rain kept falling slowly and steadily. The sky was overcast with black clouds. Vinnie felt that she made but slow progress, hasten as she might. The night, when it came, would be very dark, and she dreaded lest it might overtake her before she reached home.

With wildly beating heart she pressed on; and soon the landmarks began to grow familiar to her. She was weary and almost heartsick; but she began to feel more hopeful. Things along her way looked more and more as though she

had seen them before every minute. Was she nearing the cabin? She thought so.

She had kept a sharp look-out for the clearing that her father had made around their forest-home, but she could see nothing to remind her of it.

She kept on bravely, though, never doubting one minute that she would catch a glimpse of the cabin through the trees the next.

The trees on either hand appeared familiar. She was feeling really hopeful now.

"I'll be there in a few moments, I'm sure," she said to herself as cheerily as she could. "That old crooked sycamore there looks like an old acquaintance! The clearing must be just ahead!"

She pressed onward quite hopefully now; and, five minutes later, she found herself—just where she had started from an hour before. There was the rock that she had tried in vain to move, and the great tree behind whose sturdy trunk she had found a partial shelter from the storm!

She staggered back, clutching at a bush for support.

"My God!" she moaned, "I am lost!"

She sunk down on the wet earth almost despairfully.

Then her old brave spirit reasserted itself.

"What a poor miserable little coward I am!" she exclaimed, almost angry with herself. "What can I do that is more likely to get me out of my trouble than to try again?"

It was growing dark very fast now and the cold rain was falling as slowly and monotonously as ever; but she would not allow herself to think of either the coming night or the drizzling rain—and she set out for home a second time quite bravely.

It was no desirable task that she had before her, and she did not look upon her weary walk as a mere pleasure trip, by any means. Still that bold, hopeful spirit that had borne her up through her adventures with the chief that afternoon was with her now; and she was far from being despondent.

"If I try, and keep trying," she mused, as she hurried on, "I may reach home in safety by-and-by; and if I am really lost and must stay in the forest, I suppose there is very little

choice in sleeping-places. So, upon the whole, I think I had better keep traveling about as long as I can. I will try and not get faint-hearted again, anyway."

In twenty minutes it was dark as Erebus!

Still the girl pressed bravely forward through the night. She could no longer see with any certainty. Keeping any specific course was out of the question; and it was with great difficulty that she kept her feet, at times, among the fallen trees and tangled undergrowth. But she tried to keep a bold heart.

Glancing ahead, through the blackness, to a dense thicket just in advance, she saw something that made her pause in terror. It was a pair of eyes!

Vinnie stood quite still, too much frightened to stir or cry out. That pair of fixed, fiery eyes had a sort of weird fascination for her.

All at once, while she yet looked at them, she felt the blood leaving her heart, and an awful terror took possession of her whole being.

The eyes were slowly and unmistakably advancing toward her!

She tottered back a step or two with a low cry. Just then there was a loud report near at hand. An unearthly screech, half-human, rung out on the night-air. The eyes seemed to shoot up a few feet and then they disappeared.

A man came dashing through the undergrowth, and in a moment he stood beside her.

"Vinnie!"

"Oh, father!"

"Don't be afraid, little one," Darke said, reassuringly. "It was a panther; but it is dead now. It is a fearful night. Let us hurry home. When we get there, you must tell me how you came here."

He took her hand in his and they hastened on through the night.

CHAPTER X.

A BAFFLED VENGEANCE.

KUNAN-GU-NO-NAH had not intended to push Bear-Killer over the bluff. He knew that treachery was one of his strongest characteristics, and fearful lest in some manner he should lose his revenge, or rather his chance for revenge, on his white rival, he watched him narrowly as he made ready to hurl his tomahawk in the trial of skill he had proposed to determine which of the two should put the unconscious young hunter to death; and he detected almost instantly the intention of Bear-Killer to act in accordance with this his most prominent trait of character.

He saw that the treacherous brave was poisoning his tomahawk to throw, not at the mark on the tree-trunk, but at the head of their victim!

All the quick, wild passion of his fierce nature was aroused in an instant.

He was not one to brook treachery.

With a cry of rage, he struck Bear-Killer a sudden powerful blow with his fist.

The doomed savage lost his balance and toppled over the precipice.

While yet his wild death yell rung out on the storm, Kunan-gu-no-nah threw himself flat on the ground, and craning his neck out over the bank, looked down into the foaming water below.

At first he saw nothing but the jagged rocks and the tossing flood. Then, a little down-stream, the dusky face of his victim was visible for an instant amid the eddying waters, then it sunk from sight forever.

"He will be carried over the waterfall," said the chief. "He will lodge on the rocks below. I will send the pale-face after him, and he can take his revenge down there. He will not dispute my right to the first chance. I will take my revenge now. — He can have his afterward—all he can get!"

There was no place in the red fiend's heart, for remorse for any evil deed. He had looked upon the whole affair as a fortunate accident that had rid him of one who stood in his way—nothing more!

He arose from the ground and turned his gaze upon his hated and senseless rival.

It would be impossible to depict the fierce rage and triumph that flashed from the chief's eyes, as he regarded his victim.

Clancy was still swaying slowly backward and forward over the whirling, roaring waters far below, that seemed to be filled with hoarse, clamorous voices, crying aloud for his life.

The motion of his body was more gentle now that the wind had died down. The lasso no longer jerked and cracked, threatening to break and let him down into the jaws of death, gaping wide below.

He hung pulseless and heavy, like a man that was dead—there was neither a tremor nor a pulsation to tell if he lived or not.

A hand placed on his heart would have felt the faintest kind of a flutter; that was all!

He was alive, but for how long?

It was impossible for Ku-nan-gu-no-nah to touch him from the bank.

He was uncertain whether he was yet alive.

But if he clove his head with his tomahawk, he would be sure that he was dead.

Was he going to wreak vengeance for a fancied wrong, on his vital, breathing rival, or on his soulless body?

He did not know. He knew that the soul would leave the body before his vengeance was accomplished! If the form swaying before him was alive now he would leave it dead.

Was he going to tomahawk a man or a corpse?

He did not know, and he did not care!

With an expression of fiendish exultation on his dark, evil face, he took a position not more than twenty feet distant from Vere, and drew his tomahawk.

Long practice had made him an adept in the use of his

favorite weapon, and he poised it instantly, without any apparent care. He was sure of his aim at such close range, and in a second the tomahawk went whirling out of his hand.

But it missed its human mark by six inches, and fell with a dull splash into the water.

The wind and the swinging motion of the young hunter had baffled him!

He uttered a deep curse, and drew a small pistol from his belt.

To cock it and bring the sights to a level with his eye was but the work of a moment. He pulled the trigger. There was a click as the hammer came down—that was all.

It was not loaded!

Clancy Vere remained unharmed.

The hand of Providence was in it!

With a low cry of baffled rage, he set about loading the pistol. He had accomplished it in a minute. Would anything baffle him now?

He cocked it, put on a cap, and took careful aim at Clancy's head.

There was a flash and a sharp report.

He ran to the edge of the bank and examined his intended victim's face critically; and there was nothing to indicate that the shot had been effective. Surely it had not touched his face, and there was nothing that looked like a bullet-hole in any part of the young hunter's deer-skin clothing.

Ku-nan-gu-no-nah was almost frantic with impotent rage.

In his ungovernable passion, before, at being twice baffled, he had neglected to put a ball in the pistol!

This explained why he had, as he thought, although he had taken accurate aim, missed his mark.

Ku-nan-gu-no-nah was a great warrior in his tribe. When he went on the war path he always returned laden with scalps and other ghastly trophies of rapine and murder. Besides this he was looked upon as the best shot among all the braves who acknowledged his authority as chief and leader.

Now he seemed to have lost his skill, and his rage and chagrin were unbounded.

With a snarl like that of a caged tiger, he threw the pistol over the bluff.

"Maybe it will go down to Bear-Killer," he said. "It's good enough for him! He won't do much fine shooting now, I guess! Maybe he will have his revenge on the pale-face with it. I'm going to cut the lasso and send him down, too, now. I think Sam Hair, the squaw magician, has saved him to-day with her devil-box, some way. I'll cut the lasso, and see if she can keep him from falling into the water! A tom-ahawk won't kill him, and a pistol is just as powerless to do him harm!" As he ceased speaking, he drew his hunting-knife and ran his finger along its edge.

The result of the examination was apparently satisfactory—the blade was sharp.

"I don't believe she can hold him up in the air after the lasso is cut," he muttered.

Replacing the hunting-knife in his belt, he advanced to the root of the tree, and began climbing up its trunk.

In two or three minutes he had gained the limb to which the end of the lasso was secured.

Crawling slowly along it—for it was not large, and the waters pitching and tossing underneath made his head swim just a trifle—he worked his way out to the place where the lasso was tied. How the water roared and rung in his ears!

He swung himself astride of the limb, clutching it with his left hand to make his position more secure, while with his right he disengaged his knife and dropped its keen edge on the lasso where it was passed several times around the projecting branch.

Just then a sudden gust of wind swept past, causing the tree to sway a little.

Quick as thought he placed the end of the horn handle of his knife between his teeth and with both hands clung to the branch on which he sat. It swung from side to side two or three times, and the chief reeled for a moment as if he had lost his balance. He gripped the branch with the energy of desperation, his sharp nails sinking into the rough bark, and his swarthy face turned to an ashen hue.

In a minute or two the branch became motionless and he was once more securely seated, with one hand clinging to the limb and one foot twisted in the lasso in such a manner that he could disengage it at the instant of cutting the knot.

His situation was a perilous one, but his mind was so intent on the hellish work he was braving so much to accomplish that he heeded it not.

The least motion of the tree—a sudden gust of wind—a false movement on his part—the merest trifle would bring upon him the death he had planned for the man swinging below, who, until the lasso should be severed, was more secure than he. Again he clutched the keen-edged hurting-knife, and was about to draw it across the coils of the lariat.

A strange sound arrested his attention.

It was the voice of a man.

Steadying himself in his seat, he turned his head.

He beheld a sight so startling that he almost loosened his grip on the limb. The knife slipped from his grasp and he held on with both hands.

A white man stood on the bank not ten yards distant, with a rifle leveled at his head.

He was a very tall and very massive man, of very grotesque appearance; and when the reader is told that it was Leander Mayhob, the giant hunter, and no one else, a personal description is unnecessary. The muzzle of his rifle pointed steadily at the Indian's head, and he said in a rough tone of command that the chief was afraid to disobey, and, at the same time fearful to obey:

"Come down!"

Ku-nan-gu-no-nah realized that the time occupied in the passage of a bullet from the big hunter's unerring rifle to his brain would be very short.

He attempted to hitch backward along the limb and came near losing his hold and shooting down into the roaring water below.

He looked at the giant in a half despairful way, which he only noticed by saying:

"Come down, or I'll shoot!"

Again he essayed to move himself backward along the limb. It was a perilous undertaking, but death stared him grimly in the face, let him look whichever way he would.

Once more. This time he swayed so far to one side that it was with the greatest difficulty that he regained his equilibrium on top of the branch.

Now he turned his gaze for an instant again to the man on the bank who held his rifle in his hands—the man whose father and mother he had murdered, though he knew it not.

If he had known the terrible oath of vengeance that the giant hunter had registered against him, he would have chosen to strangle in the stream underneath rather than to fall into his hands.

He paused a moment, shuddering as he half lost his hold on the limb.

Again that stern command rung in his ears:

“Come down!”

His efforts at moving along the branch toward the body of the tree were attended with better success, now that the limb began to grow larger and his seat more secure. Still his progress was very slow. He could have moved forward easily enough, but he dared not turn around.

When he paused to take breath a moment, he heard the big hunter say in his implacable voice:

“Come! D’ye want ter be shot?”

He exerted himself to the utmost, and five minutes later slid down the trunk of the tree and stood doggedly before his captor.

“Ku nan-gu-no nah is a great chief, ain’t he?” the giant said, tauntingly. “He climbs trees and can’t get down ag’in without help. Ain’t ye glad I happened along ter help ye down? He is a mighty warrior! He goes with twenty or thirty of his greasy braves in the night to kill and scalp a white-haired old man and a decrepit old woman! Some time I’m goin’ ter wipe ye out, ye cowardly red divil! but not now. I’m goin’ ter let yer live a little longer, and then when I git ready to kill ye, you’ll suffer as many awful deaths as all of your victims put together! Yer can go, now. I’m done with yer for the present. Come, don’t stand there! Go!”

He drew his rifle to his face and kept it aimed at the Indian’s head till he had gone out of sight.

CHAPTER XI.

A WELCOME VISITOR.

HAND in hand Vinnie and her father hurried on through the storm and darkness. The way was intricate and difficult to travel; but a good half-hour's walk brought them to the edge of the clearing, and the weary girl greeted the sight of the cabin, which looked like a large square patch of blackness, through the gloom, with feelings of grateful satisfaction.

It was the work of but a few moments for Darke, while Vinnie lighted a candle, to rekindle the fire that had burned out during their absence. The girl set the light on the table, and almost exhausted with the vicissitudes of the past few hours, threw herself upon a seat. The fire was now crackling merrily on the hearth, sending showers of sparks up the wide chimney, and Darke, divesting himself of his hunting-shirt and belt, stood before its genial blaze to dry the water that adhered to his deer-skin apparel. When he took off his wide-rimmed hat and, after shaking off the rain, tossed it into a corner, Vinnie noticed for the first time that his head was bandaged about with a white cloth. The hat had concealed it before, and he had not spoken of it, or asked her any questions as they came home; his mind being filled with the mystery of the oaken chest and its horrible contents and the strange words of the giant hunter in regard to his discovery of their "secret." He had made no reply to these words. He could make none except to regret the accident that had brought to his notice any thing that the twin avengers did not wish him to see; and thanking them again for the kindness they had extended to him, he came away.

Vinnie arose and coming over to where he was standing put her hand on his arm, saying, anxiously:

"You are hurt, papa! I knew something had happened to you, or Death would never have acted so strangely. Tell me about it, won't you? Does it pain you much? What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, little one. It is well enough now. The pain is very slight, and it is well cared for already. I don't think of any thing that would make it any better. But where is the dog? I don't see him here. I know he came here after I was hurt. Did he go out with you into the forest?"

"Yes," she replied with a smile. "Or I went with him, rather. I would not have gone if it had not been for him."

"Tell me about it, child," said the woodman, eagerly. Then noticing for the first time, the electric machine on the table which Vinnie had left open just as she had used it that afternoon, and the magic slippers still attached to the battery and lying on the floor near by, he went on. "Have you been taking a private shock or enjoying an electric jig all by yourself?"

"No," she replied, coolly enough, as though it was the most trivial of incidents she was speaking of, instead of a struggle for more than life with a bloodthirsty savage. "I have not been electrizing myself; but Ku-nan-gu-no-nah called here this afternoon while you were gone and I guess I shocked him considerably. He seemed to be not a little affected by the experiments of which he was the subject. I think he entertains quite an exalted idea of my attainments as an electrician."

"What do you mean, girl?" he asked, excitedly, placing a hand on either shoulder and looking down into her face in a curious, half-startled way. "I don't understand you. Has that bloody-hearted devil been here to-day? Explain yourself! Tell me what you mean!"

Seating herself before the fire, while her father listened eagerly, interrupting her often with exclamations of surprise and anger, she told him the story of the afternoon's adventures from the time of his departure from the cabin to the moment when he came to her deliverance in the forest as she recoiled in terror before the approach of that pair of lurid eyes, not omitting the mysterious disappearance of the white horse and its rider, and the leap, helpless burden that, rolled in the pall-like cloth, he carried before him across his saddle, and her subsequent unaccountable desertion by the bloodhound.

Darke was convinced from her description of the place,

that she had witnessed this strange scene somewhere in the vicinity of the twin avengers' cavern lodge; and he recalled to mind the words that he had overheard the big hunter speak in the small, closely-curtained apartment of the cave.

He seemed to hear them again, so vividly were they impressed on his mind:

"Does he show any signs of life yet? Can't be he's dead!"

Was there any connection between these unexplained words and the mystery of the white horse and its rider? Were they in any way identified?

Darke thought so.

He stood leaning against the rude mantelpiece over the fireplace for several minutes, his mind busy with conjectures. But no satisfactory explanation came to the relief of his mystified mind; and the mystery of the oaken chest, the secret of the Maybob twins, the strange words of the giant hunter, and the disappearing horse and man, persisted in remaining as deep a mystery as ever.

Vinnie, who was naturally anxious to learn the particulars of her father's accident and subsequent protracted absence and fortunate though unlooked-for appearance in the forest at the very moment when he could be instrumental in saving her life, had been regarding him attentively for a while, waiting for him to speak and not wishing to break in on his musings.

"Strange!" he said, at last, looking up suddenly. "What can have become of the dog? I never knew him to behave so before! It must be that—"

He was interrupted by a slight noise at the door. He listened intently; and a moment later the blood-hound's well-known appeal for admittance greeted his ear.

"It is Death!" said Vinnie, hastening to open the door. "He's come back!"

The next moment he sprung into the room, shaking the water in a little shower from his dripping coat, and leaping gladly against his master, who returned his tokens of regard with a pat on the head.

"You deserve a good whipping, you ungallant fellow," Vinnie said, half in earnest and half playfully, "for running

off and leaving me to get lost in the woods!" The dog paid little heed to her rebuke, and she continued, addressing her father: "Maybe if Death could only talk, he would have a story to tell, too. Perhaps he has discovered the mystery of the disappearing horseman! But you have not told your story yet. I am very anxious to hear about your accident, and every thing else that has happened to you since you went away. You'll tell me all about it now, won't you?"

And she unclosed his lips with a kiss; and he began at the beginning, and related his adventures to her, leaving out only that portion which bore directly on the mysterious secret of which the big hunter had spoken. He had blundered into a partial knowledge of the private affairs of his newly-found friends and entertainers, and his rigid ideas of honor forbade him to make so questionable a return for their disinterested hospitality as the disclosure of their privacy even to Vinnie, whom he would not have hesitated to intrust with the keeping of a life-and-death secret, had it been his own.

"It has been an eventful afternoon to us both," said Vinnie, after she had heard him through, "and as far as I am concerned, I do not know that I am very much the worse for my share of its trials. If you are not severely injured, I think we may thank our stars for having escaped as well as we have."

"I think so too," replied her father. "But, my child, you look upon the perils through which you have passed too lightly. It is no trivial matter. I shudder when I think of what might have been the ending of either of your adventures. I believe, of the two, the ravenous, half-famished panther and that fiend incarnate, Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, the latter was much more to be dreaded. To the ferocity and blood-thirstiness of the beast of prey, is added the treachery and vindictiveness of a devil, and the reasoning powers of the human mind; and, in his hellishness and subtlety, the chief falls but little short of Lucifer himself! Do you realize what you have escaped, Vinnie? What should I have done, little one, if I had lost you to-day? And, Vinnie, there is another who, I am sure, would find life very void and destitute of joy did he not dream that some day you might consent to share it with him. I allude to Clancy Vere. He is a true

man in every sense of the word, and I know of no one to whose loving care I would rather resign you than his."

He had no need to ask her if Clancy Vere's suit would be successful. He could read it in her blushes.

It was growing late now, and as they were somewhat rested, Vinnie set about the preparation of the evening meal, singing in a low voice, and building rosy air-castles as she worked, while her father busied himself with cleaning and reloading his trusty rifle, of which he felt justly proud; for a truer or more unerring weapon was not to be found for many a long mile, travel which way soever one might.

After they had partaken of the supper which Vinnie's deft hands had spread neatly upon the table in an incredibly short space of time, Darke fastened the cabin doors and windows securely for the night. As he barred the rear door he noticed that it was even darker than when they came home, and the chill rain was falling yet in a slow, persistent drizzle. The wind had died down.

The next morning the storm had ceased, but the sky was overcast, and every thing as far as the eye could reach bore witness to the fury of the tempest of the night before.

Nothing unusual transpired at the cabin during the day; and its inmates seemed very little worse for having endured the vicissitudes of the previous afternoon. Vinnie had got up in the morning completely refreshed by her night's sleep, and the pain was entirely gone from her father's head, leaving nothing to remind him of the injury it had sustained but a slight bruise on his temple that would go away in a day or two.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, as they were seated cosily by their fire of hickory wood, recounting little incidents of their adventures that had escaped them the night before, they were startled by a loud rap on the cabin door. Darke hastened to open it, and was no less surprised than gratified to meet Clancy Vere.

"Welcome, boy!" he exclaimed, giving the youth a handshake and a greeting smile in which there was no conventionality, and which was as heartily returned by Clancy, whose eye wandered over the old man's shoulder in quest of Vinnie.

The vivid blush that mantled cheek and brow, as her eyes met his, in no way deteriorated from the prettiness of her face, Clancy thought; and when she stepped forward half-shyly and put her trembling little hand in his for a moment. I think he may be pardoned for allowing his heart to look out of his eyes and wishing, as he choked back words that struggled for utterance now harder than they had ever done before, that just a little while his old friend Darke was in China, or Jericho, or anywhere but there, witnessing and, in his quiet way, enjoying the young people's happy confusion. I am sure any of my readers who may ever have been placed in a similar situation will exonerate him from all blame.

The young hunter looked pale and worn, and Darke noticed that when he came forward to take the seat Vinnie had placed for him before the fire he walked with considerable difficulty.

In reply to the woodman's inquiries in regard to his jaundiced appearance and the manifest trouble he experienced in walking, Clancy told the story of his capture by the Indians the day before very substantially as it has already been told the reader in the preceding pages of our story.

It is not necessary that we should weary the reader with a recapitulation of what has already been stated; but taking up Clancy's narrative at the point where consciousness returned, we will follow it to its close.

"When my senses came back," said he, "I found myself reclining on a couch of skins and blankets in what appeared to be a very small apartment of a cave. I was watched over by a dwarf, who was not much more than four feet high and as dumb as a door nail. This diminutive watcher strengthened me by a liberal use of spirits, and as soon as I was able to speak, summoned his giant brother, who, unlike himself, was gifted with a ready tongue and introduced himself to me as Leander Maybob, of Maylob Center down in old Massachusetts. He said he was a 'natural talker,' and proceeded to substantiate the statement by a very wordy account of the sayings and doings of his uncle Peter and an old Massachusetts minister named Tugwoller, interspersed with snatches of an old love affair between Elder Tugwoller's niece, Sally Niver, and himself. It seems that the young couple, who

were, of a verity, true lovers, were separated for life in consequence of a ludicrous blunder on the part of my giant host. After awhile I gathered from his voluble flow of words that he had rescued me from my perilous situation and brought me to his cavern lodge. When I had sufficiently recovered from the effects of my swing, I partook of some strengthening food that my new-found friends prepared for me. That was early this morning. As the day advanced, I found myself rapidly gaining strength; and an hour or more ago I felt myself strong enough to come on here, and, thanking my strange entertainers for their kindness, I took my departure. As I passed out through the cavern I saw that it was also divided into two larger apartments, one of which was used as a sort of home by the two strangely contrasted twin brothers, and the other was fitted up as a kind of store-room for trophies of the chase, for it was well supplied with arms and ammunition, while the skins and pelts of various animals were deposited in piles about the place."

"How much the latter part of Clancy's story is like yours!" exclaimed Vinnie to Darke when he had finished. "He was rescued by the same strange person and taken to the same place and nursed back to life in the same manner!"

"Yes," assented Darke, "it is a singular coincidence." Then turning quickly toward the young hunter he said. "You must have lain insensible in the smallest part of the place while I was there—I think you did. They did not tell you that I had been there before you came away, did they?"

"No," said Clancy, who had been wondering all along at the strange words of the woodman, "they did not tell me any thing of the kind. I never knew it till now."

"Strange!" replied the other. "And although I am sure I was there for quite a length of time while you lay unconscious in the little place contained off at the back end of the cavern, the giant did not tell me of your presence. It can not be that there was any cause for this concealment; and concealment does not seem to be a predominant trait of the big hunter's."

"I do not understand you," said Vere wonderingly. "Do you mean to say that we were both at the cave at the same time? Please explain yourself."

And Darke told Clancy the story of his accident the day before, and how Leander Maybob had carried him to the cavern lodge of his brother Alonphilus and himself, cared for him till he was able to come home, carefully guarding against any allusion to the oaken chest and its ghastly contents, but telling him of the strange episode of the little apartment, and repeating the mysterious words of the giant hunter, whose meaning he had until now vainly tried to discover. They felt no hidden portent now. He knew instinctively that the words he had so vainly wondered at, "Does he show any signs of life yet? Can't be he is dead!" referred to Clancy Vere.

One mystery was solved !

For several minutes both men remained silent. Darke was ruminating over the discovery he had just made and Clancy was thinking what a lovely picture Vinnie made as she leaned carelessly against the mantle, looking intently into the dancing blaze of the fire, whose red glow lit up her fair face till it seemed fairly radiant in its fresh young beauty.

Was she building air-castles again ?

Clancy was !

Raising her long lashes suddenly, she met his ardent, passionate, yet respectful gaze.

Both pair of eyes sought the floor simultaneously ; and it would have been no easy task for one to have determined which face flushed the deepest—the maiden's or her lover's ; for Clancy Vere knew he did love Vinnie Darke with all his heart.

Darke had not noticed this little by-play, and he asked, suddenly, as the pretty air-castles both had been rearing up vanished as air castles are wont to do when they are rudely jarred :

"How long do you think you were at the cavern before your consciousness returned?"

"I am not quite certain—two or three hours I guess."

"And it was Leander Maybob that rescued you?"

"Yes ; but he did not himself carry me to the cave. It was more than a mile away that he found me ; and although he is very strong, he could not lug me on his back all that distance. When consciousness returned he told me about it. Alonphilus the dwarf conveyed me to the cave."

"How?" asked Darke.

"Oh, Leander told me all about that, too. I was brought on a horse—"

"What color was the horse?" interrupted Vinnie.

"On a white horse!" pursued the woodman.

"Yes."

"You were rolled up from head to foot in a heavy black cloth, were you not?" Darke went on, eagerly.

"I do not know," said Clancy, surprised at so many questions. "But he carried me before him across the saddle."

Father and daughter uttered simultaneous cries of surprise. Another mystery was solved!

CHAPTER XII.

THE FOREST ROSE.

KU-NAN-GU-NO-NAH walked swiftly away with the deadly rifle of Leander Maybob, the giant hunter, still leveled at his head, fairly demoniac with wild and impotent rage. The workings of his dark face were fearfully suggestive of the denizens of the bottomless pit.

Had he been armed he would not have left the vicinity without first attempting the life of the man who had him in his power and who held his very life at his disposal; but he was powerless, having no weapons except a short, sharp-pointed knife which he always carried in addition to his hunting-knife, and this would be useless, except in a hand-to-hand conflict, which even in his wild passion he had not the hardihood to dare.

In an hour's time he came to the boundary of the wilderness and the broad prairie stretched its level surface before him as far as he could see. Not a tree or a bush was there visible in all this vast plain; only the tall grasses, beat down and tangled by the fearful tempest that had raged through the afternoon.

Turning from the nearly direct course he had been pursuing,

the chief made his way, with long, rapid strides, to the place where, in the midst of a dense growth of bushes in the center of which there was a little plat of smooth, grassy ground, destitute of undergrowth, he had tethered his horse early in the afternoon. In less time than it takes to tell it, he was mounted and galloping away over the plain.

In a little while he struck an indistinct, scarcely worn road, or rather broad track—one of the emigrant routes of the North-west. He followed the track for an hour or more and then making a gradual *detour* to the left, kept on at a swift rolling gallop which he never slackened till he reached the Indian encampment, situated at the foot of a steep, rocky hill that loomed up through the storm and darkness, in dull relief against the leaden sky. Throwing himself hastily from his horse, he stalked rapidly along and entered a wigwam at the further end of the encampment. An aged Indian sat on a roll of skins at one side of the place, in an attitude of deep grief or despondency. He simply glanced up as the chief entered, then dropping his face again into his hands, sitting silent and apparently in great agony of mind.

"How is the Forest Rose to-night?" the chief asked, glancing toward a couch of skins and blankets on the opposite side of the lodge, on which he could see the form of a female reclining by the dim fire-light that illuminated the wigwam. She lay silent and motionless as though life had fled.

"The Forest Rose is very ill," replied the old Indian, mournfully, "and she will die! Yon-da-do, the great medicine man, has said so. He has made use of all his ceremonies and mystic arts, but he can not save her. The lovely Forest Rose must die!"

As he ceased speaking he arose, and lighting a small pitch pipe torch in the fire, went over to the side of the couch. Throwing aside the covering from her face, he allowed the light to fall upon it for a moment. It was a beautiful face, doubly lovely—the face of an Indian maiden in the first flush of womanhood. She was rather light for one of her dusky race, with heavy masses of raven black hair falling in lovely confusion about her statue-like face, in whose contour the hard angularity of the Indian type was not discernible, and down upon her perfectly-shaped neck, and softly-rounded

shoulders. Her long, heavy lashes lay upon her cheeks, which were very pale, hiding her dark lustrous eyes, which, when lighted up with health, added not a little to her almost bewildering beauty. But now the lovely Forest Rose lay like one dead.

"Let my father look up and be happy!" said the chief. "Ku-nan-gu-no-nah has seen a medicine-woman to-day, that can surely bring back life to the Forest Rose. The medicine-woman that I saw was a mighty conjuror. The Great Spirit has given her greater power than that of Yon-da-do!"

Who is this mighty magician?"

"She is a pale-face maiden, as beautiful as the Forest Rose," replied the chief.

"Would she come?" asked the old Indian, while a hopeful light flashed out of his aged eyes, undimmed by the flight of time. "Would a white medicine-woman come to give life back to an Indian girl?"

"She would not come willingly," said the crafty chief, "but she must be brought! If she is not, the Forest Rose will die!"

"Then she must be brought!" said the old Indian, decisively. "I will call a council of braves in the morning, and a party shall be sent to bring the white magician. The Forest Rose must be saved!"

The aged Indian was the real chief of the tribe—that is, although he was too old to go on the war path, leaving the active fighting to the younger and more warlike Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, he was the real moving spirit, always planning and ordering all important movements of the band. The long-haired Forest Rose was his daughter.

"It is well," said Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, as he went away.

The great medicine-woman will save the Forest Rose, and again she will sing like the birds in the trees to gladden the heart of her father, the great chief."

Wild Buffalo, the aged sachem, called a council of braves early in the morning, and at midday, the subtle Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, at the head of a dozen picked warriors, was riding over the prairie in quest of "Sun-Hair," the beautiful magician.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

"So the mystery of the disappearing horseman is explained very satisfactorily at last, Vinnie," said Darke, after their surprise had subsided somewhat.

"Yes," she replied, "all but the mystery of his disappearance."

"True," said her father; "we are still in the dark concerning that. How could it have been accomplished?"

"I know not. It vanished before my very eyes!"

"It was doubtless owing to some peculiar turn of the path he was following, or something of that sort," reasoned the woodman. "A very sudden turn among the dense growth of shrubbery that is so thick about the place might have concealed the white horse and his rider from view almost instantly."

"I think very likely it was owing to that or a similar cause," returned Vinnie. "I suppose we shall have to accept that explanation till a better one presents itself. It is strange that I should have allowed myself to be alarmed at so trivial a matter. I do not think I am superstitious. But that limp, helpless-looking black thing did appear ghastly through the storm!"

It will be remembered that Clancy had not heard of Vinnie's adventures and perils of the day before; and he did not understand the conversation that the others had kept up for the past few minutes. Noting the questioning look on his face, the woodman said:

"There is still another story of peril and escape that you are yet to hear. I believe I will take a short bout in the forest in search of a turkey; and if I am successful we'll have a supper fit for the President. Vinnie can tell you the story while I am gone. Be sure you don't leave out any of the important points, and don't forget to mention your lover's visit yesterday. A truthful account of the *shocking* manner in

which you treated him ought to be a caution to sparks! If I was a young fellow, now—"

"There now! stop!" said Vinnie, with a vivid blush. "I think you're really too bad! And besides, you are not fit to go out to day, after your hurt, and—"

"That will do," interrupted Darke, banteringly, examining the lock of his rifle the while. "I am well enough for any thing now, and I mean to take just this one more hunt while I've an opportunity. I dare not leave you here any more alone, you know, and I'm going while I've got Clancy here to keep guard over you! So good-by, and don't think of my coming back for two hours at the very soonest!"

She went up to him for her customary kiss.

"There," said he, as he bent and pressed his lips to hers. "Good-by, little one. And, Clancy, I want you to see that no one repeats this operation during my absence. She's all I've got, and I leave her in your care. Don't forget the story, Vinnie!" And a moment later he passed out, closely followed by the blood-hound. Vinnie seized hold of one of the great brute's long ears, and bending low over him, to hide her flushed face from Clancy's view, said, playfully:

"There, Death, don't run away from him as you did from me yesterday!"

Then, while the young hunter thought she was putting herself to a great deal of useless trouble, considering that the room was very warm already, she went and busied herself at the hearth, for what seemed to him a very long time, stirring the fire and putting on more wood.

"What story does your father mean?" he asked, when she had at last finished. "I thought from what you said that you saw the dwarf when he was carrying me to the cave. It can not be that you were out in that terrible storm?"

"But I was," said Vinnie, with a smile, "and I half think I was the victim of almost as serious a series of accidents as yourself. Papa told me to tell you the story, and I suppose I must obey. Are you sure it will be of interest to you?"

"Yes," he replied, eagerly. "I know it will be of interest to me. Tell it, please."

And, half shyly at first, Vinnie complied with his request. He interrupted her many times during her recital, with ex-

clamations of surprise and wonder; and when she had finished, and sat demurely before him, with her little hands folded in her lap, and her lovely face sober and thoughtful, he said:

"Heaven be praised for your deliverance! What if you had not escaped?"

"Why, then, I suppose—" she began, surprised at his excited manner. But he cut short what she would have said, by saying, vehemently:

"If you had not, I would not now account my life worth as much as a burnt charge of powder!"

Vinnie glanced up at him quickly, but her long lashes drooped as she met his ardent look.

He arose to his feet, and standing up before her, went on in rapid, eager tones:

"I love you, Vinnie Darke, as I can never love another woman in the whole world! I ask for your love in return. Can you—will you give it to me, Vinnie darling?"

She sat silent a moment—a moment that seemed interminable to the anxious young hunter—with flushed face and downcast eyes. The next, she was clasped in his strong arms, and he pressed a tender kiss on her brow, as he said, in a low voice:

"Do you love me, Vinnie?"

The lovely, golden-brown head bent down until it was pillowed on his bosom, the red, full lips were pressed half timidly to his, the deep, loving blue eyes looked trustfully up into his own, and Clancy knew that she was his till death!

"My own darling Vinnie!" said he, proudly.

"Yes," she whispered, "yours always!"

I am afraid if the woodman could have seen the little episode that was taking place in the cabin then, he would have thought Clancy just the least bit forgetful of the injunction he had put upon him when he went away—of course he would not willfully ignore it!

There was a slight, almost imperceptible sound outside the cabin, that escaped the young hunter's usually quick ear, and a dark face was pressed for an instant against one of the lower panes of the little window at the side of the door. It was withdrawn almost as soon as it appeared.

"And you will be my wife, Vinnie—mine to love and cherish always?" Clancy went on.

"Yes."

"And your father? What will he say?"

"I do not think he will oppose us very strongly," she said, remembering his words to her that afternoon.

"We will ask him and see, when he comes back."

Again that dark face peered into the room a moment and then vanished as it had done before.

But so engrossed were they with each other—their minds so filled with their new-found happiness—that they had no time to think of any thing else.

"How hard I shall try to be worthy of your priceless love, and to make your life happy!" said the young hunter, as she released herself from his embrace. As she stood up, her eyes were turned toward the window.

The face was flattened against the glass again!

"Merciful Heaven!" she cried, "there is Ku-nan-gu-no-nah! Oh, Clancy, save me!"

CHAPTER XIV.

VINNIE A PRISONER.

DARKE had been gone but a little while from the cabin, before he was startled by the report of fire-arms, and the shrill war-whoop of the band of Indians who, under the leadership of the wily Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, had been sent out to capture Vinnie and bring her to the relief of the suffering Forest Rose, who, although they knew it not, was dead, having dropped quietly and peacefully away soon after they left the encampment.

These sounds came from the direction of the cabin, and by a kind of intuitive perception, he knew in an instant what was taking place there.

He had just discharged his rifle at a fine turkey that the blood-hound had come upon in a dense thicket; and reloading it as he ran, he dashed with his utmost speed through

the tangled undergrowth and over fallen trees and heaps of half-decayed brushwood back toward the scene of the conflict, which still continued, as the sharp, oft-repeated reports of guns and the appalling screeches of the Indians attested.

The terrible suspense and agony of mind that he suffered in the few minutes that passed before he reached the edge of the clearing, it would be impossible to depict. He knew that the young hunter was as brave as a lion, and would not give up while life lasted; but he judged from the steady and rapid fire kept up by the savages that the odds against him were fearful.

"My God!" he gasped, as he bounded forward, holding his long rifle ready for use at an instant's warning, "the bloody fiends will butcher them both! If I could only be there to help them!"

Suddenly, as he ceased speaking, the firing, which for two or three minutes past had been almost incessant, stopped. There was a moment of awful silence to the listening woodman, then there came a loud crash.

Darke knew what this was.

"Heavens!" he cried, "the devils have forced the door! Nothing can save them now! Their doom is sealed! Oh, Vinnie! Vinnie!"

His agony was terrible.

He had reached the boundary of the clearing. It was rapidly growing dark now, and he had little fear of discovery. He paused a moment to reconnoiter. Only two Indians were visible outside the cabin. He raised his rifle to his face; his aim was quick and sure; and an instant later one of the savages threw up his arms, and with an ear-splitting screech of agony, fell on his face, dead.

Almost simultaneously with the report of the woodman's trusty weapon, another rung out inside the cabin.

"It is Vinnie's revolver!" muttered Darke as he stepped quickly out of sight behind a clump of bushes and proceeded to reload. "Thank God she yet lives!"

Peering out, he discovered that the remaining Indian had set fire to the cabin and was skulking around the other side, probably to get out of range of his unerring rifle.

It was nearly dark now, but the settler fired again, and a

bullet went crashing through the savage's brain, just as he had almost gained the coveted shelter.

Vinnie's revolver cracked again inside the cabin as Darke rammed home another load; and he uttered another fervent "Thank God!" as he thought that she had been saved thus far. At his request, she had placed it upon her person that morning, and he had reason to think that it was being fired by her own hands. He could not distinguish the sound of Clancy's weapon from the Indians'; but he knew him well enough to be certain that he would not yield except with his life.

The fire was creeping up the side of the cabin, gaining ground rapidly in the dry timber of which it was constructed. In a few moments the whole building would be in a light blaze. An attempt to extinguish the flames would, Darke saw, be fruitless.

There was no one to oppose his advance across the clearing since he had slain the two savages left on the outside to fire the cabin and guard against a surprise by any one from without, and closely followed by Death, he dashed over the intervening space to the open door of the cabin.

Looking within he saw, by the light of the fire blazing on the hearth, that Clancy Vere was engaged in a desperate, hand-to-hand struggle with three Indians. His back was against the wall, and with an almost superhuman effort he forced them back and kept them at bay with his clubbed rifle. Their guns were not loaded; but the young hunter detected one of the trio in the act of charging his rifle, while the two others vainly tried to get at him with their knives, and, quickly whipping out his six-shooter, one chamber of which held a leaden bullet that soon proved a quietus to this most dangerous of his assailants, he discharged it and had only two enemies to contend with.

The next moment the young hunter's clubbed weapon fell with deadly force upon the head of one of the Indians, crushing it like an egg-shell, while at the same instant the other fell, pierced through the brain by a ball from Darke's unerring rifle.

Clancy had fought like a tiger, and though he had not been dangerously wounded, he had not escaped unscathed.

A bullet fired through the window, before the Indians had forced an entrance through the battered-down door of the cabin, had grazed his temple, making an ugly though not dangerous furrow, and carrying away a portion of his ear. The blood was trickling down his face, and dropping upon the floor at his feet.

Darke sprung into the room at a single bound.

"Vinnie!" he cried. "Where is Vinnie?"

"Gone!" gasped Clancy.

"Gone! My God! what do you mean?"

"The Indians made her a prisoner!"

"Vinnie! My Vinnie a prisoner in the hands of those devils! And you let them take her?"

"Stop!" exclaimed the young man, while an expression of keen pain swept across his face. "I could not help it! I would gladly have laid down my life to save hers! For a time we fought them side by side. There are five dead Indians here on the floor. She killed two of them. Only two of the chambers of her revolver were loaded; and after they were emptied I fought them alone, shielding her form with mine. Then I was set upon from all sides at once, and she was snatched away from me. I did all I could. She was *my* Vinnie, too, Mr. Darke, and I will wrest her from the power of that red demon or die in the attempt! You do me injustice!"

"Pardon me, boy," said the woodman, extending his hand, which was readily taken by Clancy. "I was mad! I did not mean what I said—please forget it if you can. If we can not get her back, I believe I shall go crazy!"

"Oh, we *can* get her back—we *must*!" cried the young hunter. "We must get help and follow them and take her out of their hands or die!"

"How many are there in the party?" asked Darke.

"I am not certain. At the beginning I think there were about a dozen or fifteen—I do not know exactly. Five are dead."

"There are seven dead!" replied Darke. "I shot two outside!"

"Then there must be a half-dozen, more or less, that have escaped, taking Minnie with them."

"They have been gone twenty minutes," said the woodman; "and we must act at once!"

"We can not follow them to-night," said Clancy.

"Not to-night! Why?" and Darke evinced disappointment.

"Because they are mounted. They left their horses at the edge of the forest. It is scarcely three miles away. Before we could overtake them they would be miles out on the prairie, riding at their horses' best speed. We can do nothing alone, and horses are indispensable—we must have them."

"Where can we get them?" Darke asked, admitting to himself the truth of Clancy's reasoning.

"At the settlement. We can have every thing ready to-night and start before daybreak."

"Who do you think we had better get to go with us?" asked Darke. "We must have good men."

"I think we can do no better than to have Pete Wimple for one," said Clancy. "A truer and braver man can not be found in the North-west."

"True," said the woodman. "And the big hunter for another!"

"If we could only get him!" exclaimed Clancy.

"I'm sure he will go. He hates the Indians with an undying hatred, and is glad of any opportunity to wreak his terrible vengeance on them for the cold-blooded butchery of his aged parents."

"Yes," said the young hunter, "he told me his story. What a fiend incarnate the chief is!"

"You mean Ku-nan-gu-no-nah. Was he with the party?"

"He led them," said Clancy. "I think he instigated the attack to get possession of Vinnie."

The youth shuddered as he thought what might be her fate in such hands. How he longed for the morning.

Darke remembered the promise he had made to Leander Maybob the day before, and wondered if he could restrain himself from shooting the red demon at sight.

"Do you think we will need any one else?" he asked.

"I think not. There will be four of us; and Pete Wimple and the giant hunter will be a host in themselves."

"We must make all our preparations to-night," said Darke, "so as to be far on our way at daylight."

"Yes. We must— What's that? It sounds like fire!"

A strange sound had arrested his attention.

"It is fire!" replied Darke. "I saw one of the devils fire the cabin. It must be all in a light blaze before this time!"

"Then it was fired before you came in?"

"Yes. It was set at the rear, and that is the reason you have not seen or heard it till now. The flames were climbing the roof as I crossed the clearing. But we must not stay here. One of us must go to the settlement and the other to the cavern to-night. Do you think you can walk well enough to undertake to get to the settlement? Your ankles must be—"

"Yes," and the look on his face confirmed what he said, "I could do any thing—brave any thing for her! There is nothing that I would not attempt to save her from pain—nothing that I would not dare, to make her happy! Vinnie is more to me than my life, Mr. Darke! To-day, before those red devils came to tear her away from me, she promised to become my wife."

"I believe you, boy!" exclaimed Darke. "I could not intrust her to the protecting love of a better man. If we can only save her she shall be yours!"

"Thank you," said the young man, earnestly. "We must save her from that demon's power! The thought that she is in his hands is maddening! But we must act. I will go to the settlement and obtain horses and enlist Pete Wimple in our cause, while you proceed to the cave to secure the services of the big hunter. I'm sure he will not refuse us his aid."

"Right," assented Darke. "Where shall be our place of rendezvous?"

"Near the big pine tree at the edge of the forest. We must be mounted and on our way before daylight."

The fire had caught in the great oak trees that had been left close up by the walls of the woodman's home as a partial protection against wind and storm, and the flames, shooting heavenward, cast a lurid glow over the dark forest for quite a distance in every direction.

The two men hastened away, the burning cabin lighting their way through the wood, Death, the blood-hound keeping

close to Darke and manifesting his sense of the calamity that had overtaken them by giving utterance ever and anon to low, sorrowful whines.

CHAPTER XV

WHAT THE SCOUTS FOUND.

WHEN the sun rose the next morning—for the day broke clear and cloudless with a keen, frosty atmosphere—its rays fell on a heap of smoldering ruins, encircled by a dozen charred trees burnt and blackened to their very tops. This was all that remained of Emmett Darke's cabin home.

The four men, Darke, Clancy Vere, Leander Maybob, the giant hunter, and Pete Wimple, a tried and trusty scout and Indian-fighter, were at the appointed place of rendezvous at a very early hour, and, well mounted on four fleet, strong horses that Clancy and the scout had obtained at the settlement, they were at daybreak dashing over the smooth, level prairie in pursuit of Ku-nan-gu-no-nah and his party.

For hours they kept on at a rapid, even gallop, which they neither quickened nor slackened. Clancy and the scout, riding side by side and keeping a sharp look-out ahead for any signs of the enemy, while Darke and the giant hunter were ever on the alert to guard against the approach of any hostile party from the rear.

None of the four had spoken more than a few words since they left the big pine, hours before, even Leander Maybob, usually so loquacious, maintaining a thoughtful and unbroken silence.

The day continued as it had dawned, clear and sun-shiny, the pure, bracing air inspiring the little band to more than common vigilance and alertness, while it added fresh vigor to their steeds, and they kept on at the same quick, regular rate of speed until mid-day without meeting with adventure of any kind.

Then Pete Wimple drew his horse up suddenly, and in

obedience to his low-spoken command, the three others reined in their horses.

"What is it, Pete?" asked Clancy.

"I don't know for sartin," and the scout, shading his eyes with his hand, looked long and earnestly across the wide, grassy plain before them. Following the direction of his gaze, the others saw dimly in the distance a thin blue cloud of smoke rising from the surface of the prairie.

"It's a fire!" said Darke.

"That it are!" confirmed the big hunter.

"Can it be a camp-fire?" asked Clancy.

"Very likely," said the scout. "I think as how it's somewhere 'long the line of the emigrant trail. We'll strike it pretty quick—it's jist ahead thar—and we've got to foller it for several hours. We've got to pass that fire, and afore we get too cluss, I want to know what it means!"

"It mought be whites, an' ag'in it mought be reds!" said Leander Maybob, riding to the front and examining the thin, vapory cloud for a moment or two. "It mought be emigrants takin' thar grub and it moughtn't, ye see. Prob'ly 'tis and prob'ly 'tain't, as my uncle Peter said when Elder Tugwoller axed him if his youngest-born son war a boy or a gal!"

The others could not restrain a laugh at this; and when their merriment had subsided Darke asked:

"What do you think is best to be done, Wimple? You and Leander are learned in every department of prairie life and warfare, while Clancy and I are the merest novices. We shall trust ourselves and our enterprise in your hands."

"I think, as it's about grub time, you and me had better ride ahead and discover, if we can, whether there's white men or Injuns or suthin' else around that are smudg, or whether it's jist a muskeeter smoke, while Low-lander, as you call him, and the boy busies 'emselves about gittin' suthin' for our appetites ag'in' our return."

"I agree with ye thar!" said the giant, "as Elder Tugwoller remarked to my daddy when he expressed his opinion as how donations was a good institution; but my name ain't Low-lander."

"What's in a name?" laughed Darke as he and the scout rode away.

"Thar's a good deal in names, I notice," said the big hunter, half musingly, as he swung his long left leg over his horse's head and slipped to the ground. "I reckon thar's a sight o' valler in names. If 'twasn't for folks bein' named so's to tell 'em apart, they'd git all mixed and twisted up so a feller couldn't tell w'ich from t'other or t'other from w'ich! Now I don't go very strong for seein' things git all mixed and twisted up so's ye can't discrimernate w'ich from w'ich. If it hadn't been for jest sich a darn'd mixin' and twistin' of two different things together in my head, I'd likely now be a married man, livin' as happy as a hornet in yer breecherloons, down to old Maybob Center in Massachusetts, the Bay State and capital of Bosting, the hub of the univarsal *terry firmy*. It's an awful world we're livin' in," he went on, as he tied his horse, as Clancy had already done, by means of lariats they had brought with them. "It's an awful world! I never know'd a man to go clear through it 'ithout gittin' the wind knocked outen him somehow! It's this mixin' an' twistin' as does it all! It's that as caused all my misery and pains and heart-longin's, and sighin's and so forth and so on. I know folks in gin'ral wouldn't go for to take me for a lovyer—you, now, youngster, look more like a lovyer than I do; sorter like a despondin' lovyer, more'n any thing. But don't ye git downhearted now. We're a-goin' to git yer sweetheart back to-day! I'll tell you how I found out about it," he explained, noting Clancy's look of surprise, "I heerd ye talkin' about her afore ye come to, fairly, yisterday. I didn't mean ter hear yer, and didn't go fer to pry into any of yer secrets; but I couldn't help hearin' ye say ev'ry few minits, 'Vinnie!' 'Vinnie!' I heerd Darke say his gal's name was that to-day; and so I put this and that together and know'd you was her lovyer. I'll tell you 'bout my gal an' my love affair, and then we'll be even. All our trouble come of this mixin' an' twistin', as I told you afore. Elder Tugwoller's niece, Sally Niver, as purty a gal as ever wore caliker—she used to live along o' the Elder and his wife—and me got acquainted with each other to singin' school, and afore we know'd it we was both on us purty nigh as deep into love as Lord Lovel and the Lady Nancy. The Elder didn't 'prove of the match, and Sally an' me uster spark on the sly. The Elder found it out and licked Sally

and forbid her ever to speak to me ag'in. She cum right straight and told me, and said as how the Elder and Miss Tugwoller would be away Saturday night over to the widdar Mork's and wanted me to come down an' see her while they was gone. I rigged up and went down; and jest as I got inside the yard I see Sally cummin, down the path to meet me, and the tears was a-streamin' down her face. 'They ain't gone, deary!' sez she, 'and if they see you we'll be in an awful pickle!' I couldn't go away without inquiren' what was the matter. 'Oh!' sez she, 'I've had to take—uncle's bin a-givin' me—' 'Another lickin' I'll be bound!' sez I. 'Sally, yer mine, afore Heaven, and I'm a-goin' to trounce that old cuss within an inch of his life for abusin' ye so, if he is the preacher!' 'Oh dear!' sez she. 'You don't understand he—oh, what'll you do? Thar he comes now!' And sure enough, I looked up and thar come the Elder down the path a-makin' motions and a-swingin' a big hosswhip. I thought he was a-goin' to lick Sally ag'in, and she screamed and I jumped afore her. Jest then the hosswhip cracked round my legs. 'Young man,' sez the Elder, 'you've got things kinder mixed and twisted up, like, in your mind. Your mind's considerably mixed and twisted. You don't understand as how I don't want ye here at all, and you've got mixed and twisted up about the lickin', like. I hain't bin a-givin' my niece a cowhidin'; I jest give her a dose of peppersass for a cold, and that's what brings the water outen her eyes. I'm goin' to give the cowhidin' to you!' And he axed the blessin' and commenced. The gad played kinder lively for a minit, then I jerked it outen his hand and throw'd it over into the garden, and sez I, 'Elder, if you think I'm goin' to stand sich you must be kinder mixed and twisted up, like, in your idces! Then I knocked him down and kissed Sally good-by and walked away. I hain't never seen her since. The Elder sent her away to school and I come West—and that's the end on't all. I s'pose she's married long ago!' he finished, sadly. 'She was jest the sort of gal as ketches men! It was all owin' to my mixed and twisted state of mind concernin' the lickin' and the peppersass!'

By the time they had prepared the noon-day meal, Clacey saw Darke and Wimple coming back; and in less than ten

minutes they threw themselves from their horses a few rods away, and after tethering them, came up with rapid strides.

"What did you find?" asked Clancy eagerly; "any signs of Vinnie or her captors?"

"We found some of the devil's own handiwork!" answered the scout, a dark, fierce look on his usually pleasant face that the young hunter never saw there before.

"The smoke we saw arises from two burning emigrant wagons that the Indians have plundered and then set fire to!" said Darke. "One man, evidently the guide, lay dead and scalped, his body, with those of three savages who had been shot in the affray, half burned up in the fire! The remainder of the party, which I should judge was not very large, have either escaped or been made prisoners."

"It is Ku-nan-gu-no-nah's work!" said Clancy.

"I've made up my mind to settle with him party soon!" said Leander Maybob, sternly. "His time's most up!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PHANTOM RIDER!

FIVE minutes later the little party was on the move again.

About the middle of the afternoon they halted for a moment's consultation. Darke was not surprised when the scout informed him that the Indian encampment was not more than a half-dozen miles distant. He had long been anxious to reach the village. The suspense was growing to be almost unendurable to him.

At first, Leander Maybob took little part in the conversation and bent his gaze anxiously every few minutes upon the horizon in the direction whence they had come.

"Would you advise a bold charge through the Indian encampment?" asked Clancy. "Do you think we would be likely to accomplish our object in that way?"

The scout thought not. The savages might be on the look-out for some such movement as that, as they would prob-

ably expect that an attempt would be made to rescue Vinnie, in which case they would run great risk of falling into some trap set for them by the Indians, if they approached the encampment boldly and in the full glare of the sunlight. Their party was too small to hazard being taken at so great a disadvantage. They dared not show themselves openly in the camp of their enemies. The odds would be too great against them.

"No!" said Wimple, emphatically. "We mustn't try such a plan as that. It would be worse than useless! What we do must be done by stratagem. There's a steep bluff, only 'tain't a bluff, neither—thar ain't no river under it—jist back of the Injin camp. This hill's all grown over with low scrub-oak and other stuff so thick ye can't see a rod any way. If we could only git up there and hide till arter dark, and then two or three of us jist step quietly down and release the prisoners, leaving some one to have the horses ready to mount at an instant's warnin', I think we could git the gal clear without much blood-lettin', and maybe the other prisoners, whoever they are. It's the best plan I can think of now."

Darke agreed with the scout that nothing could be done by daylight, but he was getting very impatient.

"I think," said the big hunter, "as how ye're partly right in yer calkerlations and mayhap partly wrong. I don't believe as how us four rushing into the imps' nest would do much good. We'd be very likely to git our little lump of lead, every one on us, and that'd be the end on't all; but instid o' climbin' the hill, if ye'll jist take the advice of one who has fit Inj'ns some, and stop in the border of the wood, down level with the edge of the prairie, and wait an' see what happens, I b'lieve we can do suthin' as 'll amount to suthin'. I've knowed some of the best kind of jobs to be did in gittin' away prisoners from the reds, jist by watchin' and takin' advantage of accidents and the like. If you'll all do jist as I say an' not git flustered or go to gittin' away up there on top of the hill, I'll promise that every prisoner in the Indian camp shall be safe before sundown—yes, in less than two hours. You don't know what amazin' helps accidents is sometimes, in sich cases as this one!"

"Can you do it?" asked Darke, eagerly.

"Yea."

"What do you mean by accidents?" inquired Pete Wimple. "What d'ye expect's goin' to happen to-day?"

"Thar's no tellin' exactly," replied the big hunter. "A feller can't most always tell what is goin' to take place. But I'm safe in guaranteein' thirty or forty of them reds one of the tallest accidents in a little while—'bout as soon as we can git to their camp—they ever had any ijee of!"

"Do you expect to kill as many as that?" asked Clancy, some wonderment.

"I calkerlate as how, if yer a mind to foller my lead, we can e'en'most clean out the nest and git yer gal and the rest of the prisoners away safe, besides! What do ye say? Shall I go ahead?"

"Yes," cried all three with one voice. "You shall lead us!"

"I believe you can do what you say!" added Dirke. "But remember that a mistake on our part might prove fatal to Vinnie and the others!"

"There shan't be no balks or mistakes!" said the giant, in a tone of assurance, taking his place at the head of the party. "We've got to leave this emigrant road here and take to the left a little. An hour's sharp ridin' 'll bring us to the Injun camp. Let's be movin' on."

And tightening their reins, the quartette dashed away.

There was a plain trail, left by Ku-nan-ga-no-nah's band, leading directly to the encampment of the savages. The little party followed this for a while at a swift gallop, and then in obedience to a low, tersely-spoken command from their leader, left it suddenly, and bearing still further to the left, dashed for a few minutes through the edge of a broad belt of timber lying along the base of a range of low hills, halting at last in a chapparal not more than a hundred yards distant from the Indian village.

"Here we are," said Leander Maybob, throwing himself off his horse. "Jist git off yer nags and stretch yerselves a little, while I take a look outside. Make the most outen your restin'-spell, for I can tell yer that ye won't have long to lay idle. I'm expectin' an accident soon!"

And with these strange words which the three men were assured held more meaning than they expressed, the giant

strode away and disappeared from view among the shrubbery. In less than five minutes he came back, and his face showed that the result of his reconnoissance was satisfactory.

"There'll be an accident soon," said he.

"How soon?" queried the scout.

"Inside of a quarter of an hour."

"Will it assist us in any manner?" inquired Darke.

"Yes; it'll be the makin' of our job."

"How?" asked Clancy.

"Its on-sartin," replied the big hunter. "Accidents is on-sartin things; but this one 'il be sartin to help us if we're ready to help ourselves. I've noticed as how the same accident don't happen twice, any more'n a boy takes his fust chew of terbacker twice. 'Tain't anyways likely this 'ere accident we've been waitin' for 'll happen more'n onc't. So we must be ready to take advantage of it jest at the right minit! Now then, how many shots have we got altogether?"

"I've got a six-shooter and a rifle, both loaded," said the scout.

"Seven," said Leander, counting.

"And I've got six," said Clancy.

"Thirteen," counted the big hunter.

"And I've got two revolvers and a rifle," said the scout.

"Twenty-six," said the giant, "and I've got seven more—thirty-three in all. If there ain't any of 'em wasted, we can shoot jist thirty-three Injans without stopping to load! Now git on yer horses and stick yer pistols in yer belts and hold yer rifles ready for instant use. I want to take one more look-out, and I'll be with ye in a minit."

The big hunter's prompt manner and cool, baffling way of talking had inspired the three men with the utmost confidence in himself and his power to bring their enterprise to a successful termination, and they obeyed his orders implicitly. In a moment they were mounted, their unerring rifles ready for use at a moment's warning.

"Are we going to dash into the encampment?" asked Clancy, examining the lock of his revolver.

"It looks like it," answered the scout, sententiously.

"What can the accident be?" questioned Darke.

"That's a riddle!" said Wimple.

"And a hard one to guess!" added the young hunter.

Just then the giant came running through the chapparal, and hastily seizing his rifle, which he had left standing against a tree, threw himself upon the back of his horse and rode to the head of the little band of wondering, anxious men.

"Wait a minute!" he half whispered.

There was a moment of dead silence, the four men almost holding their breath in their suspense.

Then a shriek rang out on the air—a shriek that was half a wail, half a curse—so weird and so unearthly that for a moment the blood seemed to stand still in the veins of the three startled men.

"My God! What is that?" cried Darke.

"It's the accident we've bin waitin' for," said the big hunter, calmly. "It's purty near time for us to take advantage of it. Git ready."

At that moment there came from the direction of the Indian encampment an almost deafening report, followed instantly by cries of agony and fear.

"Now's our time!" cried the big hunter. "Shoot down every red-skin you see! But don't harm a hair of Ku-nan-gu-no-nah's head if you can help it! Take him alive!"

As they cleared the chapparal, they saw a sight for which even the terrible cry of a moment before had not prepared them.

It was a gigantic human skeleton, standing upright on the back of a milk-white horse that moved with more than the speed of the wind. In the bony, grisly arms of the Phantom Rider was *Vinnie Darke!*

CHAPTER XVII

A REUNION OF HEARTS.

"It is Vinnie!" cried Darke, wildly. "Oh God, save my child!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed the young hunter, in the same breath. "What is that? Oh! my darling! She is lost! lost!" and he reeled in his saddle.

"Easy!" said the giant. "She is safe, and you shall both speak with her in a few minutes. It is Meno, the Spirit Warrior! He never harms the whites—he is their friend; and he'll carry the gal to a place of safety. Git yer rifles ready. When ye see Injuns, fire sure, and don't miss a shot. After yer rifles are emptied, git out yer pistols and shoot down ther devils as long as yer have a load left! They won't show fight much after the accident that's jist happened to 'em!"

A moment later they had left the timber behind, and were dashing across the little strip of prairie that lay between it and the encampment, but a few rods distant.

The four unerring rifles rung out almost simultaneously, and four savages lay dead or dying on the ground.

"Now yer pistols!" shouted the giant, plunging his spurs into his horse's flanks, and drawing and cocking his heavy Colt's revolver.

On they sped, their firearms keeping up an incessant rattle, dealing death on all sides.

They charged through the encampment, then, whirling, came back, separating and shooting down every brave in their path, as long as they had a load left.

The giant caught sight of Ku-nan-gu-no-nah trying to hide himself behind one of the lodges, and leaping from his horse, dragged the cowed and trembling fiend out into the middle of the encampment, shrieking and howling with fear.

"It's time we had a sort of a settlement!" said the giant, grimly. "I guess we'll look over our accounts now."

The Indians, men, women and children, such as had not fallen before the terrible Phantom Rider and the subsequent charge of the four hunters, had sought refuge in the forest and thick brushwood growing on the summit of the steep, rocky acclivity at the back of the encampment.

To the credit of our friends, be it said, that they shot down only the braves. For the most part, the squaws and children escaped unharmed, but with the exception of Ku-nan-gu-no-nah and a half-dozen others, every warrior was slain.

"Where's the whites?" the giant asked the chief, with his long, bony fingers choking out the answer:

"Yonder, in the council-house."

Following the direction of the chief's eye, they saw a log building, the only one in the encampment, about twenty yards distant. It had the appearance of being very strongly put up, and had evidently been built with a view to use as a council-house.

Darke and the scout hastened to liberate the captives, while Clancy, attracted thither by the loud snarls and yelps proceeding from the interior, went and looked over the top of a small stockade, or rather pen, about ten feet square, standing a little at one side.

"My heavens!" he cried. "It's full of wolves!"

"Wolves!" repeated the big hunter, as he finished binding his cowed and terrified captive to a stake near by. "How many on 'em?"

"Eight," returned Clancy, counting. "Shall I shoot them?"

"No," said the giant avenger, a sudden thought entering his mind. "We may have use for 'em bimeby!"

"Use for them! How?" asked the young hunter.

For answer, the giant pointed to Ku-man-gu-no nah!

"Come," he said, "let's go and take a look at the prisoners. They're free now. That's two men and a woman; and one of the men's got on a plug hat and a white shirt and a swaller-tail coat and a standin' collar and a dirty choker," he went on, as they drew near the liberated emigrants. "He looks for all the world like a preacher!"

Just then the face of the man described by the giant—a smooth-shaven, sanctimonious face, that had not been wrinkled with a smile for ten years—was turned toward them, and the big hunter stopped and stood still in his tracks a moment, overcome with astonishment, staring hard at the emigrants who, with Darke and Wimple, were advancing toward them.

Clancy regarded him with amazement.

"Gracious!" he said, at last, "it's Elder Tegwaller! And oh, Lordy! that's Sally! My Sally, I mean! Oh, Lord! it's Sally! Sally! SALLY!" he cried, and a moment later he had picked her off her feet, and was holding her in his great, strong arms, as if she had been a baby.

She had recognized him when he called out to her, and flew to meet him.

The elder and the other man, as well as the rest of the party, were regarding them with astonishment. Catching sight of the stranger, Leander set Sally down as suddenly as he had taken her up, saying anxiously, as he thought he might have been hugging another man's wife:

"Are ye married, Sally? Is that yer man?"

"No, Leander," she replied, throwing herself again into his arms; and after vainly trying to reach her hands around his neck—for she was very short, her head reaching but a little above his elbows—she buried her blushing face, not in the orthodox style in his bosom, but in his fur vestment somewhere below. "No, Leander, I hain't married. I wouldn't never marry no man but you! I've had fifteen offers since I see you last, and I refused 'em all! I thought we'd meet ag'in sometime, the good Lord willin'!"

"And he *was* willin', Sally! Yer mine now, ain't ye?"

"Yes," she replied, "your'n allers—till the Bunker Hill monument crumbles to dust!"

"And we won't never git things mixed and twisted ag'in?"

"No," said she; "nothin' shan't never part us ag'in!"

And the long-sundered hearts were reunited.

"Sarah," said the Elder, through his nose, "are you going to marry with that ungodly man of strife?"

"Yes, uncle Tugwoller," she answered; "I'm a-goin' to marry that same ungodly man of strife, an' be jist as good a wife to him as I know how!"

Darke was beginning to evince great anxiety to see his daughter once more, and the ludicrous reunion of the big hunter and his old-time sweetheart, that he had just witnessed, somehow made Clancy long to meet Vinnie.

"Come," said the woodman, "let us go at once."

"Wait a few minits," answered the now happy Leander. "We've got a little bizness to attend to yet. I've got Kunnangu-no-nah tied to a stake down thar, and it's about time he retired from bizness. He's committed crimes—blacker ones than ye can imagine—and he must have his punishment. We'll give him a trial before we finish him off. Come on."

And he led the way back to the open space in the center of the encampment, where, to the same stake to which Kunnangu-no-nah had so often bound his captives, he was him-

self tied so securely that, struggle as he might, he could not get free, and knowing that his doom was at hand, he had made superhuman efforts to break his bonds, but without avail. He was completely cowed ; at the last, all his courage and hardihood seemed to have left him, and he stood, quaking with terror, his dusky face blanched to an ashen hue !

"Now," said the big hunter, laying his hand on the Indian's shoulder, " if any one here has got any charges to prefer ag'in' the prisoner at the stake, the court is ready to attend to the case."

" The prisoner pulled off my cicky to-day," said the Elder, dolorously, " and otherwise disarranged my apparel. I think he deserves condign punishment !"

But other charges of graver import were to come.

" He shot our guide," said Sally Niver ; " and put his arm round my waist, when he lifted me out of the wagon, and no decent man would do that—unless he had a right to," she added, with a glance at Leander. " I think he ought to be hung for murderin' the guide, anyway !"

" He killed my brother John !" said Wimple.

" He butchered my old father and mother !" said the giant, " and he's got to die an awful death for it ! If any one here thinks he ought to live after committin' all these crimes, let him speak !"

There was no voice to speak against the execution of the giant's sentence, and he said :

" Shall he live or die ? I'll give him one more chance."

" Let him die !" was the answer ; and almost before the startled spectators realized what had taken place, Leander Maybob had cut the thongs that bound the doomed chief to the stake, and rearing him above his head, hurled him over the low stockade, among the snarling, half-famished wolves !

Retribution had come at last ! He had expiated his many crimes ! The vengeance of Leander and Alonphilus Maybob was accomplished !

A few moments later, the whole party rode out of the almost depopulated Indian village, the liberated captives mounted on some Indian ponies that they had found tethered near by.

" Now, Mr. Darke, we'll go to yer gal !" said Leander.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

IN a little chapparal not far away they found Vinnie, an dear Ber, sitting on the ground, was Alonphilus, the dwarf. At a little distance was tethered the white horse—there could be no mistaking it—the same milk-white steed that had carried the ghastly form of Meno, the Spirit Warrior, as he rushed by them a little while before, bearing the girl in his grisly embrace.

Pete Wimple approached the animal, as it stood picking at the beaten-down prairie grass, and kindly touched it once or twice on the back.

“What ye doin’?” asked Leander. “Tryin’ to see if it’s well groomed?”

“No; I was tryin’ to make up my mind if ’twas ra’al, genuine hoss-flesh, or jist a shadder.”

“It’s a real hoss!” said the giant, stooping, while all their eyes followed every motion curiously, and stretching up the ghastly length of the bony frame of a large, powerfully-built man from out of the thick grass at his feet. “And here’s the Spirit Warrior as has killed and scart to death more Injins in the last six years than ten men could finish off in the old-fashioned way in ten years! My little brother, thar on the ground, a-tyin’ a big knot in the end of that string, ain’t very wide acrost, as ye can see, and the space atween the ribs of this ’ere thing is big anuff for him to crawl in all over. So, when he gits inside of it, and stands upon that white hoss and flings bomb-shells, and fires off rockets among a pack of reds, I guess they think he’s one of the tallest kind of spirit warriors, and about the worst *accident* as ever befall ’em! I’m a sort of a ventriloquizer, and I ustter hide in the woods, and holler like Meno, the spirit, is said, to.”

Darke, leaving Vinnie and Clancy to the enjoyment of each other’s society for a few moments, had come forward while the giant was speaking, and as he finished, he said:

"And that explains the mystery of the oaken chest, also, does it not?"

"That's all there is of the hull mystery and the hull secret," said the giant, in reply. "I don't mind tellin' about it now, cause I'm a-goin' to marry and retire from bizness. My uncle Peter—and he was a unavarsal—"

"But your brother is dumb. How did he produce that wful screech?"

Alonphilus raised a small, curiously contrived whistle to his lips, and a moment later, the same wild, terrifying cry that they had heard before, rung out on the air.

Ten minutes more, and they were again mounted and ready to set out for the settlement.

"Sarah," said the Elder, in his nasal voice, "I ask you again if you contemplate becoming the helpmeet of that worldly man of conflict?"

"Yes, Uncle Tugwoller," she replied, sweetly, reining her horse up by the side of Leander's. "You'll marry us to-morrow, won't you?"

"If I must," he said, dolorously, tugging away at the corner of his disarranged dicky, "if I must, and my remuneration is forthcoming."

"You've triumphed, Sally," said the giant lover, with a tender intonation on the name. "My uncle Peter uster say as how a female would if she wanted to, and if she didn't, she wouldn't. I hope the Elder ain't a gittin, things mixed and twisted."

It was after nightfall before the party arrived at the settlement. At times along the way, the Elder experienced much difficulty in maintaining his place on the back of his horse. Once he lost off his dicky, but he bore the trip with surprising equanimity.

The Elder was alone in the world now, save for Sally, his wife having died two years before.

With his niece, in company with Henry Black—the man whom, in our last chapter, Leander suspected might be the husband of his sweetheart—the Reverend Tugwoller was on his way to join a colony of eastern people then forming in the far North-west, whither he had been called to act in his ministerial capacity. Of course now that Sally had so hap-

pily—or unfortunately, he would have said—met with her first and only love, and they had been so felicitously reunited, this plan was abandoned; and the next morning he pronounced them man and wife, at Pete Wimple's, where the company spent the night in the presence of our assembled friends. He settled quietly down with his niece and her husband, who abandoned the wilderness soon after and took up the life of a farmer in the interior of Michigan. He tried in vain to bring Leander to a realizing sense of his innate wickedness, and began to think at last that Sally might have done worse, after all, when it came to his knowledge that the beatified fellow was the fortunate possessor of two or three hundred acres of fine land, clear of all claims, besides about five thousand dollars hard cash that his father had received for his place in the East.

The dwarf dwelt with them and was tenderly cared for by his giant brother and his kind-hearted sister-in-law, to the end of his life. He always kept the death-record with the big knot at one end in commemoration of the terrible charge of the four men through the Indian encampment and the awful death of Ku-nan-gu-no-nah, the slayer of his parents.

Clancy and Vinnie were married in due time, and, with Emmett Darke, they went farther south, and purchasing a farm lived very happily indeed.

Pete Wimple, the scout, is a gray-haired old man now; but his eye is as clear and his form as erect as in the days of yore; and his story of the chase and the war-path are the delight of all the boys in the settlement.

Death, the blood-hound, died of old age twenty years ago.

THE END.

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